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THE
MINER'S
SON

Presented
TO

'Jack cleared his voice, and began, to a slow, familiar hymn-tune, the words, "Why should we sit in gloom," etc.'—THE MINER'S SON, page 37.

(*Frontispiece.*)

THE MINER'S SON,

AND

MARGARET VERNON.

BY

M. M. POLLARD,

Author of 'The Minister's Daughter,' 'The Two Sisters,' 'The Old Farm House,' etc. etc.

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THE MINER'S SON.

CHAPTER I.

BEN TREGARTH'S HOME.

'WHERE can that lad be?' exclaimed Annie Tregarth, as for the sixth time she came to the door, and strained her eyes over the bleak prospect, trying in vain to catch a glimpse of the missing truant.

Ben had gone out just after dinner, taking two of his younger brothers with him. The weather was clear and bright then, but now a rough, cold breeze was springing up, the gathering twilight of a May evening was coming on, and still the boys had not returned home.

'Good evening, Mrs. Tregarth. Are you looking out for Sam?' said a pleasant voice beside her; and, turning round, she saw Thomas Penhurst.

'I don't expect Sam just yet, sir. I'm watching for our Ben: he went away hours ago, and took Harry and poor little Josh with him. He will drag

reserved

TO

Wesley's teaching in these remote parts, and of his earnest, prayerful interest in the spiritual welfare of the miner? The bread was not cast on the waters in vain; even to this day it is found there, influencing the hearts of many of the people.

Penhurst was well known in Northern Wheal district. He taught in the Sunday school, visited the sick, and often raised his voice in prayer far down in the black chasms of the earth.

Of late he had received some promotion, and he was not obliged to labour as continuously or as hard as many of the other men; so he had more time to indulge in his favourite studies, and to enjoy the bright sunshine of the world above.

Ben had been for some time now in his class in the Sunday school, and he had begun to take an interest in the boy, from his quickness in learning and his inquiring disposition.

Poor Mrs. Tregarth was not a native of that rugged part of the country. When a rosy-cheeked girl, she was servant at a farmhouse in Devonshire, and none among the farmer's girls were as active and careful as she was. She milked the cows, made the butter and rich clouted cream, and sold it at the market. But the old farmer died, and, while staying with her aunt, near the mines, she had met with young Sam Tregarth. He was then a handsome, muscular-looking man, with a broad chest, and arms well fitted to ply a huge hammer. He, warm-hearted and affectionate as he was, soon persuaded the Devonshire lass to share his fortunes, and she had given up the moors with their blackberries and whortleberries, the luxuriant hedges all wreathed with roses and

honeysuckles, of her native place, and come to the barren wastes and arid soil of the mining districts.

But she had obtained one advantage from leaving her inland home in the centre of Devonshire,—she had gained an unequalled sea-view, that was ever changing and ever grand. I am not sure Mrs. Tregarth fully appreciated this, for she would often shudder when the wild storm was out, and the waves were dashing in against the cliffs with a noise like thunder. She called it 'uncanny' when the feathery spray broke over the rude headlands like clouds of smoke.

Another thing she had never grown accustomed to during her thirteen years of married life was the danger of mining work. The accidents were frequent, sometimes from carelessness, and sometimes from causes that could not be prevented; but while the other women of the village bore them calmly as a matter of course, and would speedily dash away their tears, to busy themselves in giving as much assistance as they could, poor Annie Tregarth would lose all self-possession, and do nothing but cry over misfortunes she had not courage to relieve.

Fortunately Sam had hitherto escaped; but in that little place all were neighbours, and when trouble came to any of the families, all more or less were supposed to assist and sympathize.

Ben took a stool very near his old friend Mr. Penhurst, and looked up in his face with a conscious expression of pride and satisfaction, that the other understood at once.

The first introduction to the mysteries of an underground life is always a grand event to a young lad

of the mining districts. It is his greatest ambition to be allowed to dive down into the regions of darkness, and to take his place among the workers, like a man.

Born among the rugged scenes and bare plains of these regions, seeing the machinery of all kinds, the deep shafts, the engine-houses, and the piles of ore, he knows of little else, and he wishes for nothing else.

We, who are accustomed to the light and sunshine of the bright world above, know little of the scenes that are continually going on down at 'the bottoms of the mountains,' where 'the earth with her bars' is around and about one; and it may be a salutary study for us to ponder for a while on the 'brave hearts' and 'willing hands' that are ever employed in bringing up for us stores of metallic wealth.

CHAPTER II.

TALK ABOUT MINES.

'SO you are going down with father to-morrow?' said Mr. Penhurst, looking at Ben with a smile.

'Iss, sur. I'm a-goin' down the Bal, and mother 'ill be to 'um all alone,' replied the boy, as he gave a glance at his mother, who was clearing away the dirty cups, and wiping the slops on the table, 'making it tidy-like for father.'

Ben spoke in the peculiar phraseology of the district; but as an interpreter would be required if the conversation was given in that dialect, we will content ourselves with putting its meaning into our own words.

Thomas Penhurst had nearly got out of this peculiar way of speaking, and he generally dropped the idiom when talking above-ground, but down in the mines, with the men round him, none could give out the words with a broader twang than he could.

Mrs. Tregarth finished her preparations by spreading a clean, coarse cloth on the table, emptying the tea-leaves, putting a fresh teaspoonful of tea in the pot, and then setting it on the hob to draw.

'Will 'ee 'ave a dish of tay, Mr. Penhurst?' asked she presently.

'No, thank you; I had my supper before I came out. I only want to put Ben in mind of a thing or two, and then I must be off. You must remember what I told you before, Ben, and not be rash or foolhardy down below. Many a fine fellow injures himself for life by the silly practice of racing up the ladders. It's hard work at the best of times, and *that* you'll soon find out. Why, it takes more than half an hour to "come to grass." You should never try to do it in less time than that. Let the other young fellows say what they like, don't you race with them.'

'Now mind that, Ben,' said Mrs. Tregarth, who was gently rocking the cradle to and fro with her foot. 'Mind what Mr. Penhurst says. It was racing up the ladders that made poor Jack Williams burst a blood-vessel. He fell into a consumption after that, and lies in the burying-ground of the chapel.'

'Another thing, very foolish indeed,' said Penhurst, 'is racing to the kibble.'

'How do they try that?' asked Mrs. Tregarth.

'There's no fear of Ben's injuring himself that way yet,' replied Penhurst. 'He's far too young to attempt it. But it is just as well he should be warned of the danger in time. I've done it myself, Mrs. Tregarth, and I tremble now to think how I could have dared Providence in such a manner! One miss of catching the kibble, and I should have been hurled to the bottom of the shaft and killed in an instant.'

'There are many dangers in a miner's life,' said Annie, with a shudder.

'Yes, there are many that are unavoidable, and it makes me angry when I see men rush into foolish risks of their own accord. The kibbles, you know, are the iron buckets used to carry the heavy masses of ore up to the surface. They are always moving up and down, banging against each other and against the sides of the shaft, with great rapidity. Not a very enviable method of travelling, one would think! And yet the silly boys in the mine will risk their lives in trying to catch hold of these great buckets, that they may be drawn up without the trouble of mounting the ladders. If *that* is not foolhardy, I don't know what is.'

'It's dreadful to think of! Don't you ever try that, Ben. Promise me, will you?'

'That I will, mother. I never should have courage for such a thing.'

'It's not courage,' replied Penhurst quickly, 'it's reckless daring. A man has no right to risk the life God has given him. There are idle boys in the mines, Ben, as well as in the farmyard or in the city, —fellows who will swear, and think it manly, and who smoke and drink underground as well as above; but don't you join them, don't make them your companions, and don't copy their vices. The eye of God penetrates into the secret places of the earth; there's no darkness to Him there. He will be ever near you, if you call on Him. Trust Him at all times. He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defence,' repeated Penhurst slowly, as he rose to go away.

Mrs. Tregarth was quietly wiping her tears as she bent over the cradle, trying to hide them from her boy, and yet unable to keep back the shrinking of heart that had been oppressing her all day.

It was bad enough to have poor Sam delving more than two hundred fathoms down in the stifling atmosphere, but to give up her bright-eyed boy to such a fate seemed to her anxious mother's heart a very hard thing to bear.

How she longed to give her own exertions in helping out the family earnings! There was plenty of work for her to do, had she only time for it; but her large family, her lame boy, and her young infant kept her a close prisoner within the walls of her cottage.

Only a quarter of a mile away were the sheds and workshops, where most of the women and girls and young boys of the village were employed in washing and preparing the ore for the use of the smelter. She would fain have joined the busy ranks there, and worked her nine or ten hours a-day among them.

But she could not leave her children; and she would be more tied to them than ever when she had lost Ben's active services, for he was like a right hand to her.

All these thoughts were making her very low and unhappy, and she held out her hand to Mr. Penhurst in a dreary, hopeless manner.

'I shall watch out for Ben to-morrow at sunset,' said he cheerfully. 'Your husband must keep good hours now, Mrs. Tregarth, and not work after time. The lad ought not to be kept down too long at first. I hope you won't neglect the Sunday school, now you

are going to work on your own account, Ben. You'll come to my class as usual, won't you?'

'Oh yes, sir, that I will. I shall have all my Sundays just as they were before.'

'Good-bye, then, and God bless you! Cheer up, Mrs. Tregarth! There's a good Providence to watch over your boy, and make a true man of him yet.

'"Onward, girded for the strife,
Weapons ready at our side,
Taking still our part in life
Worthily, whate'er betide.

If our trust in God is sure,
Earth in vain her snares may try:
All our faith is built secure,
All our refuge is on high,"'

repeated he, and he went out of the door, nearly striking against Sam Tregarth, who was coming in.

Stopping a minute to exchange greetings with the newcomer, Mr. Penhurst went on his way across the moor to his own lowly home.

Sam Tregarth was a true specimen of the Cornish miner. Tall, broad-chested, and wonderfully taciturn, he seemed a man much more given to deeds than words.

No one could wield the hammer with greater force or more perseverance than he could; he was content to sit in the steaming atmosphere of the mines long after most of the other men had 'gone to grass,' if by so doing he could earn a fair livelihood for his fast increasing family of helpless little ones; but the 'Northern Wheal' had been yielding sparely of late, and his labours had been very hopeless and discouraging. The effects of this showed in many ways in his household. Their food had become much

plainer, and less in quantity; coarse barley bread had taken the place of wheaten flour on the table,—not that the former is less wholesome, but the children thought it hard to have the dark, less palatable crusts day after day.

Even for this poor fare there was an account running up at old Madge Burnet's, who kept the little shop that supplied everything, from golden treacle to salt pilchards.

Madge never liked giving credit, and every time Annie went to the shop she felt the goods were given to her grudgingly.

'I'll pay 'ee, never fear, the first bit of money I get,' she would say; and Madge would shake her head, as though *that* was a story she often heard but didn't much believe.

'So you say, Mrs. Tregarth, and so every "humman" says as comes here. I don't know what's come over the people of late; when the money does come in, it's slow in finding its way to clear off scores with me. The St. Low people are getting too fond of dress, Mrs. Tregarth; the lasses must have their finery now, and the pedlar gets most of the profits.'

So grumbled old Madge; and Annie would come away, with her baby in one arm and her bread and tea in the other, feeling very dispirited and weary.

The trifle that had been laid aside for a rainy day had been drawn out from the Savings Bank and spent long ago; things were very gloomy and discouraging with the Tregarths just then; and this was the reason it was determined Ben should go down, young as he was, and give his father what assistance he could in the mine.

Sam Tregarth was a 'tribute-worker,' that is, he did not receive regular wages, as a tut-worker does, but his way of being paid was this:

Whatever ore he was fortunate enough to dig out was taken to the smelter and sold, and he received a certain per-centage on its value.

Had the part of the mine he was working in been yielding well, his profits might have been good; but unfortunately the solid rock had become unproductive; he had been living on 'subsist money' for many weeks past now, and was growing very moody in consequence.

Sam had taken off his miner's clothes at the 'changing house,' and had given himself a wash at the water trough; but his ablution had not been very exact, and traces of the red earth could still be seen on his forehead and nails.

He flung himself on a chair as he came into the cottage, and glanced round without speaking. Very weary and haggard he looked; and Annie put the weak tea, brown bread, and about an ounce of butter on the table in silence.

Ben watched every movement of his father, but did not venture to speak to him till he had swallowed about a pint of tea and had finished all the butter; then in his shrill treble he asked,—

'Did you cut a good pitch to-day, father?'

'No, Ben, no; I've been doing very slight this long time,' replied Sam, with his mouth full. 'Never you mind about that, though; we'll come on a "keenly lode" some day, and then mother 'ill make her fortune.'

'I don't want no fortune, faither,' replied Annie.

'You take care of the boy, and bring him home safely; that's all I want now.'

'Faither, may I do what I like with my first money?' asked Ben loudly.

'Drat the boy, he'll waken the cheeld!' exclaimed his mother, bending down over the cradle and humming a low tune to the baby. 'You speak lower, Ben, and keep your shouting for down in the tunnels to-morrow.'

'All right, mother!' replied he cheerily, and then asked the question again. 'May I do what I like with my first money?'

'That depends on what you want it for. Money's too scarce now to waste any, my boy. Tell us what you want it for.'

'Well, I want to buy mother a new gown when the pedlar comes round next,' replied Ben, looking very shy.

'When does the pedlar come round?' asked his father.

'Every few weeks; and I want mother to have a nice stuff dress with flowers on it.'

'Stop, stop, boy; not so fast!' exclaimed his father. 'Don't you be reckoning on earning money all at once. Here have I been delving and blasting whole tons of rock, and not getting enough to pay for my trouble, and you want to get rich all in a hurry! Have patience, have patience,' added he, with a sigh. 'And now, mother, read us a chapter out of the Bible, and let's get to bed. Don't you oversleep yourself, Ben; we must go down early to-morrow morning.'

But Ben did not sleep as soundly as usual that

night. The next day was to be an epoch in his life,—a time to date from, to look back at and to be remembered all through his future career.

'Father always damped people's courage,' he thought; but he was not going to 'do slight' like that. He'd find out the 'peacock ore,' with its beautiful shades of green and blue and yellow; and mother *should* have a new gown after all, and be able to go to chapel as she used to, before her dress was so shabby and her children so numerous.

CHAPTER III.

GOING DOWN.

THE next morning Ben was up very early indeed, and looked as fresh and brisk as a lark, as he crept about the house,—*crept*, for he feared above all things waking up little Josh; he knew well the disturbance there would be should he hear Ben was going to leave him.

So he brought in the wood, lighted the fire, and put on the kettle for mother, then went out to finish sundry occupations of his own.

His father had, two or three years ago, enclosed a bit of land from the waste that surrounded their cottage, for nearly all the houses were detached, and scattered about here and there without any regard to uniformity, nor was there the slightest attempt at their being planned into streets. So it happened that the Tregarths had a tidy piece of ground, where potatoes and cabbages flourished, and helped out many an otherwise scanty meal.

Ben was a capital gardener in a small way; he dug the ground, planted the young plants, and altogether assisted his father in the short periods Sam was able to give to surface work.

One special corner of the ground was Ben's own, to do what he liked with, and here he was at liberty to display his taste. Accordingly he had planted wall-flowers, clove pinks, sweet-peas, and other favourite things, and these he tended with a watchful care.

They were all looked at and watered in the early morning, and then other pets claimed his attention.

Thomas Penhurst had given him a couple of rabbits, fine 'parkers,' and for these he had built a rough hutch. Ben now ran out on the waste and gathered a large handful of juicy milk-thistles for them, petted them for a minute or two, and then glanced round at the scene.

The sun was just rising and dispersing the morning's mist, rising in bright red clouds, that might remind one of the words, 'A red sky in the morning is the shepherd's warning.'

Flashes of crimson were reflected on the sea, which was dashing in large waves against the cliffs, and beating angrily on the black, jagged rocks.

A storm was doubtless rising, but what matter would that make to Ben?

An hour or two hence he would be down far out of the sound of the loudest storm. A hurricane might spend itself over his head, but not the slightest breath of it would reach him, or ruffle the close air he would be breathing.

Thunder might echo along the moor, and vivid flashes of lightning might play over the sea, but the loud storm would be unheard in 'Northern Wheal.'

Ben might even be working out under that restless sea, for some of the low levels of the mine extended far below the ocean's bed, and nothing but

the mass of solid rock intervened between parts of the mine and the water.

I don't know that Ben thought of all this as he looked out on the wide sea-view; very likely not, for there was a nearer scene that might perhaps interest him more—a large level moor covered with objects, that to an unaccustomed eye might seem bewildering, but Ben knew every inch of the ground.

On one side, about a quarter of a mile away, was the mine, and near it the tall chimney of a great steam-engine, whose work was to pump the mine dry. Not far from this was the 'changing house,' where the miners took off their soiled mining clothes, and left them to dry.

There were also numberless rudely built sheds, used for various purposes. There were structures of lofty scaffolding, large platforms, huge iron chains, pulleys, wheels, and complicated-looking machinery.

Tramroads were laid in various directions, along which the rough ore in its various stages was conveyed, to be prepared in the sheds for the furnaces of the smelters.

At that early morning hour the air was already getting thick and smutty from the black puffs of smoke from the tall chimneys, and brick-red streams of water flowing near the sheds showed the work of the day was beginning.

It was no placid, quiet scene—far from it. The whirling of the vast wheels, the clanking of the great chains, the thumps of the immense hammers, worked by steam-power, that crushed up the masses of granite to powder, and fell with ponderous blows, all formed a clatter, and a clamour, that never ceased.

The birds fled in terror from the unearthly riot, and took shelter in calmer scenes, where there was less disturbance and more congenial beauty.

Harsh and bare, bare and harsh, was that Cornish moor, but it was the scene Ben Tregarth had looked on day after day, ever since his eyes had begun to notice anything.

When he returned to the low-roofed cottage, his mother was already up and moving about, with a grave, anxious face and quiet step. The children were still asleep, and she was getting the breakfast ready. Not much variety from last night's fare! the same black, butterless bread, weak tea, and boiled groats and water for the little ones.

'Is Josh asleep?' asked Ben, as he came in.

'Ay, that he is,' whispered his mother, 'and I hope he'll keep so till you are gone;' but the wish was a vain one. A howl rose from his little crib, that woke up the other children at once.

'Lie still, you naughty boy!' exclaimed his mother; and 'Take me out! take me out!' came from the child.

'I suppose we had best bring him out, mother,' said wise Ben; 'we shan't be able to pacify him now.'

Accordingly Mrs. Tregarth and Ben lifted poor Josh's small crib and brought it out into the kitchen, placing it beside the baby's cradle.

Josh, who had strongly suspected the whole matter before, now found his suspicions were correct, and began to wail piteously at the idea of Ben's departure.

'Now you must stop that noise,' said Ben, going

over to him. 'I shan't be long away, you know, and I'll give you something pretty if you are good.'

'What will you bring me pretty?'

'Oh, I'll bring you'— and Ben began to think, but he soon remembered there was nothing pretty down in the region to which he was going—nothing bright or lovely there.

'You shall have my ship, if you will take care of it,' said he, with great determination of manner.

'Your ship!' Josh could hardly believe his ears. It was a pretty little thing, about a foot long, rigged schooner-fashion, that Mr. Penhurst had made for him, and that he had occasionally taken down to the pools on the rocks, to sail for Josh's gratification.

It was Ben's prime treasure, the delight of his heart; so poor Josh was surprised and pleased at the prospect.

'I don't mean that you are to keep it, Josh; only you shall have it on your crib all day; and don't break it, mind, or let baby get hold of it.'

'That I won't; I'll take care of it,' said Josh, handling the little craft.

'And you must amuse baby, and try to keep it quiet while mother's working,' whispered he.

When Ben and his father set out for the mine, the moor was crowded with people, all hastening in various directions; young girls and children were going towards the sheds, where they would be employed all day in washing the crushed masses of flint and stone, to separate it from the metal.

Many substances are mixed with the ore, such as slate, granite, quartz, and red earths. These are

separated by numerous washings, as the metal is heavier than the rubbish, and sinks to the bottom.

Not very pleasant work, perhaps, but far from unhealthy; and the young women and boys looked happy and cheerful as they nodded to Sam and little Ben.

'Here comes Miss West,' said Ben, as a pleasant-looking girl came walking quickly towards them from the other direction; 'she's a teacher in our Sunday school;' and Sam nodded to her, as he recognised her as the daughter of one of the underground captains of the mine.

'Where are you going, Ben, with your bundle of clothes?' asked she, smiling.

'I'm going down the mine with father, miss,' replied he, with a grin of satisfaction.

'For the first time?' asked Miss West more gravely.

'Yes, I'm going down to help father;' and the boy lingered behind, while Sam walked slowly on.

'Well, I hope you'll like it, Ben, and be very careful. Here's a little book I have in my pocket, called *Light in Dark Places.* I don't suppose you'll have time to read it down in the mine, but there are pretty verses in it that you might learn, and repeat when you are at work.'

Ben took the small, blue-covered book with great delight, and was going to run after his father, when he saw Thomas Penhurst coming.

Penhurst held out his hand rather awkwardly to Agnes West, and seemed more confused than the occasion warranted. He soon recovered himself, and turned to Ben: 'I thought I should be in time to see you go down. How do you feel now, my man?'

'All right,' replied Ben, laughing. 'Are you coming down the mine with us, sir?'

'Not now. I'm busy with surface-work to-day, but I'll watch you out of sight.'

'Oh, I should like to watch him also; couldn't I, Mr. Penhurst?'

'I'm afraid you'll find the ground soft and miry, Miss West, there 's so much tramping round the shaft,' replied he, looking at her clean gingham dress and white hat.

'I would not go very near, of course; but I should like to see Ben Tregarth make his first attempt, poor boy.'

'Will you come over to the hill yonder, Miss West?' and Thomas pointed out a little raised mound a short way off.

Ben scampered off after his father, who was already in the changing house, and had put on a pair of flannel trousers the colour of the brightest red ochre, a flannel coat to match, and a huge hat, all besmeared with candle grease and red mud. Huge red boots completed the costume, which was not exactly elegant, or fitted for a promenade in Regent Street.

This was not all, though. From his buttons were dangling two or three lots of tallow candles,—Ben's supply and his own,—and over his shoulder were slung his tools and his provisions.

'Bear a hand, Ben, or I shall leave you to find your way by yourself,' was his threat, which, however, he had not the slightest intention of carrying out. And then Ben robed himself in his little coarse flannel dress, not yet stained with the hues of the mine.

As they came to the mouth of the shaft, Ben looked over to the hill, and there he saw Miss West and Mr. Penhurst still standing. He waved his hat gaily, and his greeting was returned by Agnes fluttering a white handkerchief.

Sam Tregarth stepped down the ladder a rung or two, and Ben fixed his hat firmly on again, and followed him. It was funny work at first, going down those endless steps, ladder after ladder, and resting for a minute on the platform to look round.

The hole at the top of the shaft seemed to grow smaller and smaller, and the light from above grew gradually less and less.

Sam went on mechanically, not speaking a single word till he came to the second platform. Then, with a grunt, he lighted one of the candles, and fastened it to the front of Ben's hat; afterwards he did the same for himself with another candle.

Ben looked up towards 'the grass' again, but there was no light shining down now; the rays of the sun were shut out altogether. Nothing to illumine the place but the two dim candles at the top of their heads.

Cross-beams and ladders, ascending and descending heavy kibbles, pump-shafts and ropes, formed a bewildering scene in the narrow place, and Ben would fain have asked the meaning of everything.

But his taciturn father plodded on in silence, only lifting his head now and then to see that his boy was coming down all right. Once or twice he paused to take breath and rest himself, which example Ben very gladly followed.

It could not be called a pleasant place, for it was

darker than the darkest night down there. Above ground there is always a faint glimmer either from the stars or moon, or from reflected light, but down in the mine nothing of the sort could penetrate. But for the tiny ray of the candles, it might have realized the idea of 'darkness that might be felt'—'pitchy dark.'

There was another discomfort that might have made an unaccustomed person shrink from contact, for everything near was wet and slimy. When Ben laid hold of the rungs of the ladder with his hands, they felt sticky with wet mud. Drops were trickling down the sides of the shaft with a constant splash, splash. Drops were falling from the top; and whenever Ben ventured to look upward, they ran into his eyes, and nearly put out his candle.

Still they went on, finding ladder after ladder, till poor Ben began to fancy there could not be any bottom to the place at all. It seemed hours to him since they began to descend, but in reality they had not been more than thirty-five minutes. The place grew hotter and closer, with a damp, vault-like smell, and the boy's arms and legs began to ache dreadfully.

He thought once or twice he must tell father he was tired, but still he could hear the even tramp, tramp below him, and he took courage and followed.

At last he made up his mind he could not bear it any longer, his powers of endurance seemed all exhausted, when his father stopped suddenly and began to walk on in the darkness.

He had come to the branch level where he was at present working, and he went on over the rough way, that was strewed with pieces of rock and rubbish.

'You go on first now,' said he, pointing on; and Ben, with a plunge and a struggle, took the lead.

'Drat the booy! where be goin'? Don't 'ee see the winze straight before 'ee?' shouted out his father a minute after, and Ben looked with some awe at a wide, gaping hole in the ground, that the candle only shone a short way into.

He knew what the 'winzes' were well enough, for the mining terms were as familiar to him as his alphabet; he had heard them from his earliest days. But he was not thinking of winzes just then, for he naturally enough imagined he and his father had reached the very bottom of the mine.

But he was mistaken. There were deeper depths still; and the winzes were air-holes pierced through to give the lower levels a supply of air.

A couple of planks were bridged across this ugly-looking hole, over which Sam led the way, looking behind him to see that his son followed carefully.

'That's more than sixty feet deep, my lad. If you happened to tumble down there, I wouldn't answer for your head. Come along now, here's my shop.'

And a very remarkable-looking shop it was. A great cave, or vault, or tunnel, Ben could hardly tell which, for the two candles only lit up a very small space, and all round was utter darkness.

The floor was strewed with rough pieces of stone, and the walls were broken and hacked in all directions.

Granite, with its flesh-coloured felspar, its mica and quartz, formed the roof, flooring, and all, and on this sturdy material Sam's energies were employed every day.

Sticking his candle to the wall with a wet lump of red clay, he unslung his tools from his back, put his pasties in as dry a place as he could find, and then proceeded to work.

Ben watched each stroke of the hammer as it resounded through the mine. Other men were working not far from them; and the clanging of the hammers, and the sound of the pump, ever at work, caused the mine to be anything but a quiet place.

There was a throb of vigorous life and action everywhere, for Cornish miners can ply the pickaxe and wield the hammer with a strength few other men can attain.

But what Ben liked best was the blasting. His father took his borer and made a hole in the solid granite of a good depth, and while he was doing it he told Ben he had some hope of finding a good 'lode' there some day. He explained, in his own phraseology, that there had been a capital 'lode' there some time ago, but it had dropped away suddenly. 'I don't believe it has died out,' added he, 'for it went off all at once, and did not dwindle away by degrees, and I've been looking for it these two months.'

Poor Sam! he was getting out of heart at his frequent failures, and had almost made up his mind to give up the search and work in some other 'pitch.'

When the hole was made the depth he wanted, he put some gunpowder into it, placed a long fuse near the gunpowder, and then lighted its other end with his candle.

'We must come a good way off!' exclaimed he. 'Bring your candle, Ben.'

Accordingly they ran, half tumbling over the stones, and presently a bright flash like lightning was seen, that lit up the mine with a noonday brilliancy. It was only momentary, however; and after that a crash was heard, that Ben in his mind compared to thunder.

The smoke took a long time to clear away, and they waited some minutes before they returned to examine the result of their operations.

Sam's experienced eye saw there was a proportion of tin mixed with the broken mass, and he smilingly said that Ben had brought him 'good luck.'

'We'll send the ore "to grass" after dinner,' said Sam. 'The other chaps have stopped working, I hear; so come along, and bring your pasty with you.'

About thirty of the men were gathered in one tunnel near, just under a winze, for the sake of air and coolness, and they welcomed Sam and the youngster as they came towards them.

Candles stuck against the wall lit up the place, and showed the bare chests, heated faces, and brick-red woollen garments of the men.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MINERS' DINNER.

STRANGE and weird-like they looked, as they sat in various groups, surrounded with dim red light and inky shadows. An imaginative mind might have taken them for some spirits of darkness, instead of the honest, brave-hearted miners they really were.

Their fare was frugal enough. Those who had good wives, or careful mothers and sisters, were supplied with substantial pasties, made in some cases with fresh beef covered with a thick crust; other pasties had a large proportion of potatoes mixed with the meat, generally in that case fat bacon.

Of this latter composition were Ben's and his father's; there was pepper mixed with them to make them tasty, and the boy thought he had never eaten so delicious a morsel before. 'Mother's a capital hand at pasties,' thought he, as he demolished piece after piece.

Some of the men had brought 'figgy hogans;' others had merely bread and cheese, or bread with huge pieces of fat bacon enclosed.

Water, and in some cases cider or weak beer, were

the beverages most in request, and were stored generally in tiny barrels or tins.

The men ate vigorously, almost in silence at first; but after a while their tongues were loosed, and an animated conversation went on.

Ben was soon discovered. 'Hallo, youngster!' said one; 'so you've come down to make your fortune?'

'He'll be finding a "keenly lode" soon,' said another.

'Then I cry halves!' exclaimed Bill Dixon, 'for I only had two pounds for my last month's wages.'

'And I had less than that even,' grumbled Sam Tregarth.

'I suppose you'll have nothing more to do with that pitch?' rejoined Dixon.

Sam thought over the promising ore he had just turned up, and replied, after some deliberation, 'Yes, I shall, though. I'm not fond of changing about, and I'll work on in that direction still. Who knows but I may cut into a prime lode yet?'

And then they talked on, shrewdly, cleverly, about the prospects of the mine, that showed they understood their business thoroughly, and thought much about it. Good sense and good-humour characterized their arguments, though they were delivered in a jargon that would be almost unintelligible to our unaccustomed ears.

Peculiar and gloomy as their lives would appear to most people, the miners did not seem impressed with their hardships. Anecdotes of hairbreadth escapes were given, and deeds of bravery recounted,

that made little Ben's eyes open to their widest extent, and his heart throb within him.

Would such events ever come into his life? Would he ever have a chance of doing such deeds as the brave men they spoke of had done?

It was a thrilling prospect, and Ben felt a perfect hero in anticipation.

One thing very remarkable among these miners was, the reverence they gave to religion and sacred things: no impious jest or unholy scoff was heard among them.

If a jeer or oath was attempted by one of the younger hands, it was speedily put down and frowned at by the older and more experienced men.

Accustomed to dangers, holding each day, as it were, their 'lives in their hands,' their prospects would have been dreary indeed, had not the remembrance of an all-protecting, ever-present Providence been constantly in their minds, and thus have influenced their actions.

It was no weak superstition or matter of talk with most of them, but a sincere, hearty trust in God, that they were not ashamed to speak of and acknowledge.

> 'The Man of Sorrows, when below,
> Trod in a path of earthly woe;
> His bright example showed them still
> Obedience to a Father's will;
> And, guided by that light, they trace,
> Far off, a glorious halting place,
> Where those who on in fervour press
> Shall gain at last heaven's promised rest.'

This was what they looked forward to when the life's work was over; and many a man, while chipping away the flinty stone in the dark mine, would wander in thought to the scenes of the New Jerusalem.

Jasper walls clear as crystal, streets of pure gold like unto glass, pearly gates, and 'the Lamb the light thereof,' was a glorious picture, and stood out in wonderful contrast to the dismal gloom of the dusky and over-heated mine; and the prospect of a bright future through all eternity made the dreary present seem more bearable.

'Give us a tune, Jack,' said Dixon to a young lad about eighteen years old.

Swallowing down his last piece of bread and cheese, and taking a long draught of water, Jack cleared his voice, and began to a slow, familiar hymn-tune the following words:—

'Why should we sit in gloom,
  Because our weary hands
In lowly strivings here
  No lofty power commands?
Should creeping things of earth
  Pine for the eagle's wings?
Should little ones aspire
  To rival mighty kings?

'The lofty palace walls
  A thousand workers claim,
Before in pride they stand
  The glory of the plain.
Some place the gilding there,
  And some, with mighty skill,
Shape graceful arches forth,
  And mould them to their will.

'But lowly hands must dig
  Amidst the stubborn earth,
And give from caverns deep
  The costly marble birth.
Oh! even as our strength,
  The work to us is given,
And blessings will be ours,
  If "one and all" we've striven.

'*All* cannot reach the top,
  Or gild the lofty tower,

So let *us* never crave
For work beyond our power.
In God's own garden here
Each may his portion own,
Alike the skilful finisher
And he who hews the stone.'

All seemed to know the air and words perfectly, and joined in with harmony, boys' and men's voices blending pleasantly, and echoing again and again through the tunnels and vaults.

It was a fitting finish to that novel dinner-party; and when the last sounds died away, Sam Tregarth rose, and saying, 'Time was up,' trudged away to his pitch, Ben following slowly behind him, humming softly over the tune the miners had been singing.

If Ben had been idle in the morning, there was no want of work now. The masses of ore and rubbish that had been detached in the blasting had to be packed into great iron trucks and conveyed to the shaft, where it was packed into buckets, or kibbles, and sent up to the surface. A rubbishy, uninteresting mass it might have seemed to a casual observer, but Sam smiled as he looked at it, for he knew his next month's reckoning would be considerably increased thereby, and there was a prospect of somewhat better earnings.

He had evidently come on a more productive 'lode' than he had met with for some time, though the long-coveted and long-searched for 'peacock' ore, that produced copper, and that had dropped away so suddenly, still eluded his search.

He determined, however, to continue still in that special locality, hoping his eyes would sooner or later be greeted with the recovered vein.

At last the day's labour was pronounced over, and Sam Tregarth slung his tools again over his shoulder, and called on Ben to 'bear a hand.'

Sending the boy on a step or two in advance, with a candle stuck in the front of his hat, and similarly adorned himself, he drew in a long breath, that seemed like a sigh, and proceeded to follow him.

If going down the endless ladders had been wearying, going up was ten times more so; and when they had panted on for about twenty minutes, Ben felt his tears were mingling with the perspiration on his cheeks.

But he would not complain,—not he,—though his legs ached worse than they had ever done in his life before. The ladders seemed more perpendicular and more slimy than they had done in the morning. A single false step, and who knows where he would have landed in the darkness below?

Other miners were above them, and others below. Ben could hear their steps and deep breathing; some of them even laughed, as they called to each other, or sang a verse or two. Would the time ever come when Ben could laugh or sing in such a position?

He certainly thought such an abandonment of terror and weariness never could happen to him; and he gave a sigh of relief when he first caught a glimpse of the light above peeping down like a tiny star.

It grew larger and larger. Twilight seemed to dawn on them, then full daylight, and at last Ben stepped out on the ground, and felt so giddy that he seemed half inclined to fall back down the shaft again.

But his father pushed him on, and glanced for a moment at the boy's streaming face and wearied limbs.

'Let me rest here a minute, father,' said he, flinging himself down on the cool red mud.

But Sam pulled him up quickly.

'Do 'ee want to catch your death of cold, stopping there while you are all in a muck of heat and grime? Come along to the changing house as fast as you can, and get them clothes off. After that you may rest as long as you like.'

Oh, the delight of getting off the dirty, wet woollen jacket and trousers, and plunging his hands into the cleaning trough, filled with warm water!

Ben sluiced his face and neck, put on his own clean suit of everyday clothes, and looked round, wondering how he could have felt so tired a minute or two ago.

The fatigue was gone now. He felt fresh and vigorous again, ready for anything. And 'wouldn't mother be glad to hear all he had to tell her?'

Many changes have been made of late years that will abate the great fatigue of descending and mounting these interminable ladders. In some of the Cornish mines great improvements have been added, and both men and the ore perform their journeys with much less difficulty. But at the time Ben Tregarth went down the 'Northern Wheal' first he found the journey such as has been described.

As they came out of the changing house, the sun was setting over the sea, and water and sky were lit up with gorgeous hues of crimson. A long line of fleecy clouds was tinged with every shade of gold

and red, forming such a contrast to the darkness and gloom of the mine below, that Ben suddenly stopped and watched them, while he wondered if heaven could really be more beautiful.

The surface workers were coming in troops out of the sheds, their day's work over also, and they paused to exchange a word or two with the miners as they passed.

They also had removed the grimy mud from their hands and faces, and they wore an appearance of cleanliness as they greeted the men.

Wives came up, with two or three boys and girls at their heels, who had all been working and doing their share to add to the family support.

Many fresh, good-tempered-looking women, with bright, merry faces and dark eyes, were waiting about also, anxious to catch a glimpse of their favoured lovers as they emerged 'to grass' again.

The whole moor was alive with the fast-increasing groups. Cheerful greetings and kindly jests passed from one to the other as they gradually took their way to their lowly cottage homes.

Ben trotted silently by his father's side, exchanging a word or a nod now and then; but he much preferred watching the sunset, and thinking of the scene that was past.

This was to be a specimen of his future life. Every day, except Sunday, perhaps for years to come, would find him at his post, toiling in the depths of the earth, in darkness, in hardship, and heat. Yet he did not feel discouraged, or shrink from the prospect.

Had the feelings of his heart been analyzed, it would have been found that he was actually *proud* of

his undertakings. His young spirit was bold enough to face any danger, and he had determination that would not shrink from the obstacles and discouragements of a miner's life.

It was a sore trial to Annie Tregarth that she was not able to join the surface workers at the 'grass work.' Many a shilling might have been added to the family store in that manner; and she fretted about this in an aimless manner, thinking her lot very hard in having so many children to look after, and one of them a 'cripple.'

This, with the constant dread of mine accidents, made her life often a burden to her. Her faith was very weak, and she was very apt to grow desponding.

She was watching at the door when Sam came up, and he passed her with his usual, 'Well, lass, how be 'ee then?' and went into the cottage, while Ben ran up to her and kissed her.

'Thank God, you've come back, my boy,' said she, pressing him warmly to her heart. 'How did you get on? Were you much scared?'

'Not a bit, mother. I'm getting used to it already, I am indeed. How's Josh been?'

'He never let that ship out of his crib all day, and he's got it there now. Poor little chap, he's cried about you betimes.'

Mrs. Tregarth had done her best for the entertainment of her husband and son Some idea of making it a kind of *fête* for the safe return of the latter from his first day's work in the mine had entered her head, and she had pleaded with old Madge Burnet with more eagerness than was her wont.

I *must* have a white loaf this afternoon, Miss Burnet, and a big one too; for our Ben has gone down to work to-day, and he shall have a treat, if I can get it for him.'

Madge accordingly put a whole quartern loaf on the counter without a word.

'And I want some butter and bacon,' said Annie humbly.

The half-pound of butter was weighed and the piece of bacon cut off without a word; but as Madge folded them up, she said, 'I'm glad to hear Ben's going to give the old man some help; he's a good, civil boy, Mrs. Tregarth. And I've a couple of fresh mackerel just brought in from the boats. Now you take them home with you, and say I sent them for his tea.'

Madge Burnet was, like many other people in the world, much better and much kinder-hearted than she had credit among her neighbours for being.

Accordingly the table was temptingly spread when the new arrivals came in. The big loaf and butter graced the board, and the mackerel were fizzing in the pan.

Poor little Josh was watching out eagerly from his crib, the little craft was held daintily between his fingers, and not a rope or flag was out of place.

'I didn't hurt your ship a bit, Ben; may I have it again to-morrow?'

'Ay, that you may, and every day, except when I'm up "to surface;" you won't want it *then*, for you'll have me, you know. Have you had your supper, Josh?'

'Yes, I have,' replied he rather disconsolately;

'but we had only brown bread, and no butter or mackerel.'

'You shall have some of mine,' said Ben, as he took his place beside his father at the table; and while he is sitting there, eating his bread and mackerel with a keen appetite, handing, by the way, a large bit every now and then to Josh, we will take a glimpse at him.

Thoughtful and simple-hearted he certainly was; his broad brow and reflective-looking dark eye told that. Already tall for his age, with strong, well-developed limbs and broad chest, he was every inch an incipient miner. For that calling, lowly as it appears, no ordinary capacity is required. A miner must be brave, for he has many hazards to grapple with, steep and dangerous places to climb, and often foul air and in-pouring water to overcome.

He must be intelligent and shrewd, or how could he use his judgment in making good contracts with his employers? If through ignorance he made a bad bargain, a long period of want and privation would be sure to bring himself and family to the depths of poverty.

And he ought, above all, to be religious: he should have a firm faith in the atonement of Christ, and feel his interest in the great work of salvation sure and stedfast, or how could he be able at any time and in any emergency to risk his life, as he is often obliged to do? His motto should be,

'Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die, that so I may
Rise glorious at the awful day.'

Thoughts of heaven come like 'angel's wings' to

cheer the miner at his dreary work in the bowels of the earth. Many a prayer rises up from those dark places to the very throne of God,—'Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!'—and He who laid the foundations of the earth listens; darkness and light are alike to Him. Amid the chip of the hammers, and the clash and clang of chains and machinery, the ejaculatory prayer darts up incisively, and is laid on the 'golden altar' before the throne, 'with the prayers of all saints.' And God, who 'giveth songs in the night,' often makes the miner's heart rejoice with a deep joy, that no circumstances of life can take away.

This is no fancy sketch, for the religious character of the Cornish miner is well known. Thousands of them are members of the church they belong to,—members in heart as well as name.

But we have wandered away from Ben at the supper table, for whom his mother was pouring out unlimited cups of tea, and cutting uncounted pieces of bread and butter.

'How did Ben get on?' asked she; 'was he afraid?'

Sam looked at him, and did not reply, except a long, low chuckle of a laugh could be called an answer.

Ben's face flushed at once. He wondered if his father could have known of the inward tremble and dread he had felt at first; could he have seen the tears that had mingled with the grime on his face? and he sat mortified and vexed.

'Never mind, Ben,' said his father at last, as he rose to go out,—'never mind, thee'll be a brave booy

in time. A cheeld can't run alone all at once, you know. I had to watch him, or he would have tumbled down the winzes and owld shafts, you know, mother;' and he went out of the cottage, laughing still.

It was some comfort to Ben that little Josh thought him a great hero, even if his father did not; and his mother also had a high opinion of his bravery, and Ben valued her opinion highly.

He was always careful and kind for her, and the proudest thought of his heart now was, that he should soon have some earnings to give her.

He poured out the whole history of the day to their attentive and admiring ears, and then said he must go out and feed his rabbits and chickens.

Ben's heart was full of love for every living creature, and they paid their tribute of love in return, by knowing his voice and trooping towards him when he appeared.

'Can't I go out too?' said little Josh fretfully, as he half raised himself in the crib.

'No, no, it's far too late for you, for it's nearly dark now; but I'll bring you in the rabbits to say good-night;' and presently he returned with one of the soft, furry creatures in his arms.

'Here's old Bess, Josh, but I couldn't catch Brownie; he did not expect to see me so late, and is gone to sleep, I think.'

Josh caressed the long-eared pet for a while, and then his head nestled into the pillow, and he was soon in a quiet sleep.

Ben had many little occupations about the place before he considered his day's work over,—water

to fetch, and wood to chop for his mother; and Sam had his first nap nearly over before the youngster, tired, but not depressed, crept into his bed beside Harry, and in the same room with Josh.

His sleep was not as calm as usual on that night, for his nerves had been more acted on than he suspected. He dreamt his bed had turned into a kibble, and that he was going down, down in it, to an unfathomable depth. So he woke with a plunge and a start, and felt greatly relieved when he looked round at his sleeping brothers, and saw the moon shining in brightly on him through the uncurtained window.

CHAPTER V.

BEN'S DANGER.

THE first day was a specimen of many others to come. Ben was at his post as regularly as his father now; and the chipping and blasting went on vigorously.

The improvement in the vein continued steady, and Sam was much cheered thereby.

There was every prospect now of better pay next month, and that would include many comforts.

There would be less stint in food. 'The bill at Madge Burnet's, no doubt, might be partly paid off, and the arrears at the sick-club made square again.'

So thought Sam as he plied the hammer with renewed force, making every clang echo through the grim vaults with its power.

He was not a man who longed for money with a greedy desire for gain. He would not have 'made haste to be rich by unfair or unwise means;' but he had a very earnest wish to do the best for his family, and to keep them above want,—a wish that every man with a true and loyal heart must of necessity share with him.

Ben was getting used to the dark interior of the mine now, and that experience was beginning to show itself in a way not unusual with youngsters.

He was growing foolhardy and daring. He would spring down by the chains from plank to plank among the levels with a speed more like a young monkey than anything else. His father was constantly warning him, without any due effect, however.

One day Sam made a deep blasting hole. He charged it with powder, placed the fuse, and went off to some distance, expecting the explosion.

It did not take place as usual when the time was up, and Sam went farther away into a tunnel to get some implement he thought he might require, while Ben was watching the blasting apparatus with eager eyes.

When his father returned, he saw, to his horror, that Ben was stalking on at a stealthy pace towards the hole to see what was the cause of the delay. He was already beyond the point of safety. Should the powder go off, he would most certainly be buried among the wreck, without the chance of escape.

His father paused, horror-stricken, while Ben still went forward. Shouting would be useless. Before the word was spoken the explosion might take place. So Sam darted forward at his own risk, caught the boy by his arm, dragged him back with his utmost strength, flung him all of a heap as far away up the tunnel as he could, and with the violence of the charge fell himself on the top of him.

Only just in time. A noise like a clap of thunder shook the place. A flash, a sound of falling stones, and then thick, horrible smoke covered them.

Sam picked himself up, and shook himself to see if

his limbs and faculties were all in their right places, and then he turned to examine Ben.

The lad was lying half-stunned, his forehead bleeding from a deep cut, but his life was saved.

'Come along,' said his father, with a rough shake, 'and don't ever do that again, or you'll be scat to jowds.'

Sam was dreadfully angry. He knew from experience how many a man had lost his life or his eyesight from such venturous curiosity, and he spoke very sharply to his frightened son.

'Come along here,' said he, turning into a vaultèd cavern where he kept his tools and 'kroust,' or luncheon.

'Now sit down, will 'ee? You'll be the death of me yet, I know.'

Poor Ben, frightened out of his wits, and penitent enough now, sobbed quietly, while the blood ran over his face from the cut, and mingled with the streams of perspiration that trickled down his cheeks.

A deplorable object he looked. He was half stripped, his clothes were muddy and torn, and his poor little face looked the very picture of terror and despair, and it was thus Thomas Penhurst saw him.

He had come down the mine on duty, and when his business was finished he determined to pay Ben a visit, and see how he was getting on in his new employment.

With some trouble he had reached Sam's present pitch, and his cheery voice was heard calling as he came towards them.

'Hallo, what's the matter?' said he, stopping in surprise. But a few words from Sam Tregarth soon made the state of affairs clear to him.

'Father flung me right down agin the wall,' added Ben, with a great sob.

'Ay, indeed, and served 'ee right too,' exclaimed his father, who was still dreadfully angry with him.

'Better to be flung down than blown up in pieces,' said Penhurst, as he busied himself with pouring some water out of the canteen on his handkerchief, and wiping Ben's forehead with it. 'That cut won't signify much. Here, I'll tie it up now, and give you some sticking-plaster for it by and by.'

The boy soon recovered himself under the kindly treatment, and looked up at his friend with gratitude in his dark eyes and a smile on his lip.

'Ah, you are better now, I see. But take my advice, Ben, and never try that trick again. Your father knew the danger of such rash curiosity, and was obliged to use harsh measures to save you. We may all take a lesson from the circumstance; and when our heavenly Father seems to deal hardly with us, and to make us cry out, "Our punishment is more than we can bear," we may know the chastisement does not come without some wise reason. He is dealing us the blow in love.'

Both Ben and his father listened attentively, but did not answer, and Penhurst went on,—

'What infinite love our Father has for us! No words can express its full, deep vastness. He gave His only Son to die that we might live; and *that* comprehends all His mercy, and all our hope.'

Thomas Penhurst, while down in the mine, used the miners' phraseology, and spoke with a true impassioned eloquence, that had great weight in their intelligent minds.

He was always a welcome guest among them, and well known from one end of the mine to the other.

'Will 'ee have some kroust?' asked Sam presently, as he drew out his bundle.

'No, thank you. I've had some bread and cheese already. But if you are going to take yours, I'll sit down awhile and look on.'

Ben, whose tears were all dried up now, began his pasty, and the visitor talked on pleasantly to them.

He told many mining incidents, and astonished them by saying some of the English mines could boast of more antiquity than the English cathedrals.

'It is a fact,' said he, glancing round at the huge black vaults, the tunnels, and arches, lit up with the dim light of the two candles. The shadowy outline was visible for a short distance around them, and then paled away, till it was lost in utter darkness.

A vast cathedral indeed, and not without its worshippers, for many a sound of prayer, and praise also, had from day to day ascended from it, not unheard by Him to whom darkness is as noonday.

Then Penhurst went on to tell them that it was said Phœnician sailors from Africa and Spain came to Britain long before Christ was born, led by the report of the rich tin mines of Cornwall.

'And then,' continued he, 'about fifty-five years before our blessed Saviour came into the world, a great Roman emperor, called Julius Cæsar, heard of our tin and copper mines also, and what do you think he did?'

'I never heard. Do tell us now,' asked Sam eagerly.

'Well, he had a fleet of more than eighty ships

fitted out, and put a large number of troops on board, and came over to Britain.'

'He was soon driven home again, I daresay,' said the miner, laughing.

'Nothing of the sort, Sam. Our poor, half-naked islanders, as they were then, were no match for the well-trained, polished Roman soldiers. Julius Cæsar conquered us,—copper and tin mines, and all,—and our island became a Roman province.'

'Who would ever have thought that!' exclaimed Sam. 'I'd like to see the emperor that would try and conquer us in these days. Mining is a good old trade, to be sure; it's older than most trades, I should say.'

'That it is! I was reading the other day that the ancient Cornish miners, long before the birth of Christ, used to carry their tin in carts across a flat isthmus that connected "St. Michael's Mount" with the mainland. They used to watch for the falling of the tide, and then cross over. Have you ever been at St. Michael's Mount, Sam?'

'Often, when I was a boy. You can get to it now at low ebb, but not when the tide rises. I wonder if there were as many miners in those days as there are now?'

'I should say not. The trade's been improving ever since, I suppose. Why, how many miners should you suppose there are in Cornwall?'

'Some hundreds, I daresay,' said Sam, with a rough guess.

'*Hundreds!* I should think there were. Say thousands, man! Why, years ago there were more than thirty thousand of us, and we have not got less, I daresay.

'I never should have believed it,' said Sam, lifting his hands in amaze.

'And more than seventeen thousand of those men are members of the Wesleyan Church,' said Penhurst in a grave voice, 'and I trust also members of the Church of Christ's redeemed ones,—those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.'

There was silence for a minute or two. Sam's mind was not a quick one. He could not grasp at a thing rapidly, and these large numbers gave him something to ponder about.

'Are tin and copper so very useful, then?' asked Ben, a short time after.

'I should think they were, Ben,' replied Penhurst, laughing. 'Why, I could not tell you one tithe of the purposes they are employed for in the present day,—a great many more, I fancy, than our ancient forefathers ever dreamt of. I don't suppose, now, an old Briton, who lived nineteen hundred years ago, whose costume was the undressed skins of animals, and whose chief ornament was a fantastical painting of the body with a juice called "woad,"—I don't suppose *he* used a looking-glass at his toilet.'

'Now you're laughing at me, Mr. Penhurst; we don't make looking-glasses of tin.'

'Tin and mercury together are used; and I'll explain how it is managed. First a piece of tinfoil is made, by beating out pure tin into a very thin sheet. This is laid very carefully on an even marble slab, and mercury is poured over it, the eighth of an inch thick. A piece of glass is placed on the top, and the mercury is levelled. The glass is pressed down on the even surface, weights are laid on it to squeeze out

all the superfluous mercury, and thus your reflector is made. Of course it has to be framed, and all that, afterwards.'

'That is one use of tin, then,' rejoined Ben thoughtfully; and Penhurst went on:

'Tin, mixed with equal parts of brass, antimony, and bismuth, becomes "Britannia metal," and of this teapots and spoons are made. Tin and lead make "pewter," a very useful thing also. You have heard of pewter pots and plates. Then, mixed with copper, it becomes "bell-metal." Where would our cathedral chimes and our church-bells be if there were no mines? Ah, the steeples would be silent then!—no musical peal to summon us to church on Sunday mornings, to chime at our weddings, or toll at our deaths!'

Ben was listening open-eyed, and breathless with attention. Sam was also bent forward, with a huge piece of pasty in his hand.

'You do know things, now, to be sure!' exclaimed Sam slowly, and the young man with a laugh went on:

'With different proportions of copper, tin forms "bronze," a very valuable and ornamental metal, used for numberless purposes. Mixed with copper, it also makes "gun-metal;" and out of her huge guns Old England bids defiance to the whole world, and thunders forth her ire when called on to defend herself. You know "brass," don't you, Ben?'

'It's yellow, isn't it? Mother has some brass candlesticks.'

'Yes, a fine yellow; it is made by mixing zinc and copper. The old Romans I told you about knew its

use well, and I daresay that was one reason they coveted our Cornish copper mines. They called it "æs." All our pins are made of brass wire. Are you tired, Sam? I haven't done yet.'

'No, no; go on. What a fine thing learning is! Don't you forget all this, Ben, that he's a-telling us.'

'Copper is used in sheathing the bottom of ships, to keep the action of the salt water from injuring them; so our navy has need to be grateful to the Cornish mines. Many a gallant ship has been preserved by that same "copper sheathing." Our saucepans and boilers are often made from this metal; and there is just one other thing I will tell you of. Copper plates are used for cutting engravings on, and a beautiful and delicate operation it is. The impression is true and sharp, and picture after picture can be printed off from the same plate. But now I must be off. How's your head, Ben?'

'All right, thank you, sir. It does not pain me now.'

'Let it be a lesson to you, my boy, and don't run any more risks. Life is a great gift, you know. It comes from our Creator, and must be used in His service. We must not risk it needlessly. In His own good time God will require it from us; so we must try and have a good account to render in.'

Sam had already trudged off in his taciturn way, and Ben ran after him. They were soon hard at work, examining the stone and ore they had blasted just before dinner.

Thomas Penhurst was not an unusual sort of character in these Cornish mines. Educated at a village school among other sons of the miners, his talents

and perseverance were rapidly raising him above them. All his spare time was given to study; and he grasped many a subject that men much more highly educated would deem abstruse and difficult.

He was a religious man, and possessed a good share of moral courage. Upright in his actions, he never swerved right or left from what he considered the strict path of duty, and his example was a good influence among the men. Though he had been placed in a situation of trust by his employers, he never held himself aloof from his old comrades, or gave himself airs. He talked with them in their own dialect, and always threw in broadcast a word of instruction or advice.

Thomas Penhurst had his romance also,—a deep, abiding hope in his heart, that threw sunlight over his path, and helped him on. But this few people suspected.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW GOWN.

SAM TREGARTH was right in his reckoning after all; for when the next month's profits were given out, he found he had made a considerable advance.

It was a kind of holiday at the mine, for the men were all collected above-ground to have their wages paid, and to arrange about their future work. The 'pitches' were also settled for the coming month, and the moor had an unusual appearance of life and activity.

Ben trotted along by his father's side in his best clothes, and felt every inch a man. Sam had his Sunday things on also; and an honest, powerful-looking man he seemed, as he stalked along in his measured way.

Sam determined to keep to his old pitch,—'he might go farther and fare worse,' he very wisely concluded.

The business at the settling-house was soon over, and Sam walked away with a pleased look on his face and a thoughtful emotion at his heart. In his pocket lay a five-pound note and two bright sove-

reigns,—more than he had gained in the same length of time for many a long day.

It was not a prodigious stroke of good fortune after all, for some miners realize much larger sums when they happen on a 'keenly lode,' as they term it.

But Sam was very contented; he only hoped *that* rate of payment would go on: all his debts would soon be wiped out, numberless comforts would be added to their home, and poor, hard-worked Annie would be spared her endless worry. Life would begin to wear a brighter and a more hopeful aspect to her.

'That wasn't such a bad sum after all,' exclaimed Ben, looking up in his father's face, and disturbing his meditations.

'Middling, Ben; better than I've drawn for some time. I think *you* brought me luck, my boy, and you shall have your share.' He drew out a sovereign, and held it out to the lad.

'May I have all that, father?' asked Ben, hardly venturing to touch the golden coin.

'Yes, you may have it, boy; so make a good use of it.'

'All right, father,' exclaimed he with delight; 'I know what I'll do with it. Oh, isn't money a pretty thing?' said he, contemplating his bright new prize.

'Yes, a pretty thing when well used, but a cursed thing when abused,—*then* it's the root of all evil; and many a man has lost his own soul through it, mind you that, Ben. But here's mother looking out for us; she won't think my wages any evil to-day, I'll be bound.'

Many conferences had Ben with his mother about his sovereign, and the result of them will best appear if we take a glimpse at the Tregarths about a fortnight after this.

It was a lovely July afternoon, and most of the people had turned out of their cottages to enjoy the fresh air. The clanging of the great hammers and the rattling of chains were unheard, for a Sabbath calm hung over the place, and on that holy day the sound of labour ceased.

Families who had seen but little of each other during the working days now rambled about together hand in hand, and fathers had time to note the improvement in their little toddling children.

The Tregarths, of course, were all out. Annie held the baby, and Sam and Ben carried Josh by turns, each taking a spell when the other was tired.

Harry and Ellen darted about, here, there, and everywhere, like a pair of wild pixies, with their laughing faces and curly heads.

It might have been remarked that Ben lingered behind his mother every now and then, and he gazed at her dress with unusual interest.

It was a pale, fawn-coloured 'de laine,' and over it were sprays of pink rosebuds and delicate green leaves, so true to nature, that Ben almost fancied the sweet perfume was wafted past him.

He looked at this dress with an inspection that might have been deemed novel in a boy, had there not been a reason for it,—and this reason was, that Ben had made his mother a present of it, bought and paid for it with a part of his own money.

He had selected it himself from a shop at St. Low,

and was filled with the natural anxiety one usually feels to see how their own taste is approved.

In this case it was pronounced a success, and Ben thought he had never seen his mother look so fresh and nice. Her bonnet was newly trimmed also with pretty green ribbon. She had smoothed the wrinkles from her face also, and certainly looked ten years younger, as she held the chubby baby.

'It's my turn for Josh now,' said Ben, running up to his father, when his inspection was over. 'Come along, old fellow, I haven't carried you this long time now. Why, how light you are getting!' exclaimed he, as they fell a little behind.

'Am I getting light?' asked Josh, with a faint smile. 'Oh! I'm so glad of that.'

'Why are you *glad*, Josh?'

'Because, if I get lighter and lighter, I think I shall die, and I shall be so glad of that.'

'Nonsense, Josh! you should not say such a thing. Whoever put such rubbish into your head?'

'Everybody does. All the women, when they come in, pity mother because of me, and say it would be a good thing if the Almighty took me; and I hope He will soon.'

'I haven't patience with such people!' exclaimed Ben in a rage. 'Who makes such a speech before you?'

'Why, Sally Wilson said so, and Mrs. Brown, and Miss Agnes West— But no, she does not say so—I forgot.'

'I should think not, indeed! Miss West has more sense and kindness; she would not hurt your feelings like that. I'll tell you a secret, Josh.'

'What is it, Ben?' asked he, giving a start.

'You must not jump about in my arms like that, or I shall let you fall. I did not mean to tell you the secret till it was quite ready, but now you shall know. I'm getting a chair made for you, Josh, with the rest of my money; it's to be on wheels, and you'll be able to lie straight down in it, and anybody can pull you along as easy as anything. It won't be the least fatigue, and you can go out of doors, as far as you like; so don't talk of getting light, Josh—you must grow fat now.'

The long, thin fingers entwined themselves round Ben's neck, and the little face was pressed to his, as Josh thanked him, with his eyes full of quick tears.

Never was there such a big brother—so kind, and so thoughtful!

The world looked very bright to Ben that day, as they all stood on the cliffs, gazing down at the yellow sand and the placid blue sea—a dreamy, calm splendour, made up of glowing colours and almost perfect stillness.

The very seagulls seemed to feel the influence, and flew lazily past, or perched about on the dark, jagged rocks, with motionless wing, basking in the sun, and too idle to plunge in the water for their prey.

It was a pleasant scene of rest and peace, such as only those by the sea-side can really enjoy.

On such a day, *inland*, the roads would be dusty, the sun scorching, the pavements of the streets unbearable, and the vast, surging human mass panting and overheated.

But there was nothing of this on the cool Cornish

cliffs, where the sea-breeze came in loaded with its rich perfume; the very sight of the emerald sparkling waters was refreshing.

Sam and Annie sat and talked, while the children wandered a short way off. Not many words passed between husband and wife, for life was very 'work-a-day' experience with them now, but the quiet time did them good, and they felt all the better and braver for it.

'Come, children,' said Annie, getting up, 'we must go now, or father will be late for chapel.'

'Mother, you *must* go this evening,' said Ben for the twentieth time. He had been urging it all day, and her refusal was the one drop that kept his cup of happiness from overflowing.

'Now, Ben, you needn't ask me any more; if I went, either you or father must stay at home, and you've little enough time "on surface" to go anywhere, I'm sure.'

'But Mr. Bennet is such a beautiful preacher, mother: the chapel was crowded to the door, and you might have heard a pin drop, he was so earnest, mother, and spoke so beautifully. Do go, and I'll take care of Josh, and Ellen, and baby.'

'I'll be very good,' said poor little Josh, whose weary head was now drooping over Ben's shoulder.

All in vain. Mrs. Tregarth was not going to enjoy herself by going to chapel, much as she wished it, if her going kept her husband or boy at home. She was too deeply inured to self-denial and unselfishness for that; so Ben ceased to urge the point.

They returned by Sandy Hill, and, as they passed by a new house that was about half built, they saw

Thomas Penhurst standing before it, his arms folded, and an unusually grave look on his face.

He did not notice them at first, and they came up quite close to him before he turned.

Then he started, and a quick blush crimsoned his cheek; but he speedily recovered himself, and joined them.

'Now, Ben, you must give me a spell of Master Josh; you've had a good pull with him,' and he took the boy in his arms without waiting for a refusal.

'I'm very light,' murmured Josh.

'So I perceive; but that won't do, we must find something to make you strong and heavy again.'

Josh longed to tell about the 'chair with wheels,' but remembered it was a secret, and stopped himself just in time.

Ben turned to examine the house Penhurst had been looking at, and thought it a very nice place indeed.

It was two stories high, with five rooms in it; at the back a large piece of garden ground, and in the front a flower border, and green rails.

'Why were you looking at that new house so much, Mr. Penhurst?' asked he inquisitively.

'Oh, that is my Utopia!' replied Penhurst, laughing, while the flush again deepened on his brow.

'Are you going to live there, and shall you call it Utopia, sir? What a pretty name!'

'Not so fast, Ben, if you please. The house is not mine, and perhaps never may be; but if I had it, it would no longer be "Utopia" to me. However, you can't understand me just yet.'

'Should you like to live there, Mr. Penhurst?'

'Very much indeed.'

'Then I hope you will have your wish,' exclaimed Ben warmly, for he almost idolized his Sunday school teacher; he thought there was no one in the world like him, and that nothing could be too nice for him.

'If it will be good for me, I shall,' returned the young man, with a low sigh; 'but we are poor judges of what is good. What a happiness it is, Ben, to feel we have a loving, tender Father in heaven, who knows what is best for us, and who portions out our lot according to His will! No event of our life is trivial to Him.'

They had dropped behind the others now. Ben was walking by Mr. Penhurst's side, and Josh was nestled cosily on his shoulder, weary, and half asleep.

Ben soon told the history of his troubles. He was so anxious for 'mother' to go to chapel that evening, but she would not consent.

'She might go *now*,' said Ben energetically, 'and I'm sure she would like Mr. Bennet.'

The *now* meant a whole history, that Ben made a mental reservation of. Not even Mr. Penhurst should know *that* phase of the family affairs.

It meant that 'mother' has a gown fit to be seen in now, which had not been the case for many months before.

Oh, the patching and mending poor Annie had had at her old brown merino, making it do while it could hold together, and staying in-doors when it was too shabby to appear in public! But that was over now, and Ben felt aggrieved that his mother would still tarry at home.

'She don't like to keep father or me from chapel,

and she can't leave the three children alone,' was the burden of Ben's complaint; and Penhurst listened to him, wishing he could devise some plan to meet both requirements.

They had reached the corner now, and he stopped. 'Come, Josh,' said he, 'rouse up, my man! Ben will take you now. Good-bye for the present. I suppose I shall see you and father at chapel,—and your mother also, I hope;' and he went towards his house, revolving in his mind what old woman he could think of who would go and take care of the children in Annie's absence.

He mentioned his perplexity to Agnes West, whom he overtook as she and her younger sister were walking towards their home.

Agnes listened attentively to his short sketch of poor Ben's perplexities, and, as they reached the gate of her father's house, she said brightly,—

'I've thought of a plan, Mr. Penhurst, that will do nicely, so don't you trouble any more about it. Annie Tregarth shall hear Mr. Bennet this evening.'

And she went in at the gate, with a nod and a smile that made Penhurst think he had never seen any one so beautiful and so kind.

He began to dream about her again, as he often did now,—'sweet dreams,' in which unspoken prayers, grand thoughts, and coming hopes mingled.

Annie found the kettle nearly boiling on the hob; so she put a few sticks in the grate, and soon brought it to the right pitch. She laid the table, fed the baby, gave little Josh his sops, and then they all drew round the table.

The cottage door was wide open, and the warm

afternoon sunshine came in, flickering on the tea-cups, and dancing in tiny rays on the wall.

And with it in came Agnes West, looking like a bright sunbeam herself in her pretty muslin dress, with its fresh green trimmings.

She stood with a happy look in her eyes and a smile on her lips, watching them for a moment, and then came forward.

Sam and Ben had both got up to offer a chair, and Annie spoke her welcomes with the baby on her lap.

'Will you take a cup of tea this warm afternoon, Miss West?'

'No, thank you, Annie, I've had my tea. I did not stay long at the table this afternoon; my mother let me come away directly I had finished.'

Agnes was a frequent visitor at the cottage; scarcely a week passed but she came in, bringing a few flowers, some ripe fruit, or a picture, to little Josh.

She had grown quite fond of the poor child, with his delicate frame, and his large, spiritual, far-away-looking eyes.

Anybody could observe the child was fast wearing away—anybody but the Tregarths themselves; and they, seeing him day by day, hardly noted the gradual change that was making itself apparent to other eyes.

'I've come to stay here this evening, if you will allow me,' said Agnes, laughing pleasantly.

Of course Mrs. Tregarth persisted 'she would not hear of such a thing,' 'would not keep Miss West from chapel for the world,' etc.; but Agnes was firm. She was not the one to be put aside when she had set

her mind on a purpose. In greater things than the present Agnes had her way.

And so it ended by Annie's consenting to go, and Ben's overwhelming gratitude, conveyed in a series of broad smiles, directed to Agnes whenever he could catch her eye.

Miss West quickly took off her bonnet, and laid it aside on the window seat, making herself perfectly at home with the family at once.

A perfect picture of health and brightness she formed, as she sat near the open door, with the sunlight falling in golden rays on her brown hair, and lighting up her fair oval face.

Her light muslin dress fell in soft folds on the carpetless floor, but Agnes did not seem out of place; she would have looked well anywhere, for she had all the refined ease and simple manners of a true lady.

Her experience of things had not come from fashionable society or from mingling with town's people, for her whole life had been spent on this Cornish coast, and among the inhabitants of that neighbourhood.

Her father had been a worker in the mines himself in his younger days, but he had long outgrown that phase of existence, had laid down the hammer and chisel, and risen to be an agent or captain of the underground work.

He was thus enabled to bring up his large family in comfort, and to give them a good education.

The eldest daughter had lately been married to an agent from London, whose business brought him at times to that neighbourhood,—a well-to-do, fine-looking man.

And this good match had cheered her mother's heart, for she was not without ambition for her daughters; she had every wish that Agnes should make an equally prosperous alliance. 'Why shouldn't she,' said she to honest John West, as they were talking over family matters one day,—'why shouldn't Agnes look just as high? She's better-looking and has more sound sense than ever poor Bella had.'

'Ay, indeed,' replied John assentingly. 'Agnes might marry many a rich man, no doubt; but, as you say, she has "good sound sense," and I've my suspicions, she will not be caught by the mere jingle of gold. Agnes will never marry a man for his money, take my word of that, Bessie; she'll look deeper than the surface, and study his heart and character first; she has a perfect genius for discerning good people. She knows the ring of the true metal, and I'm much deceived if she has not discovered where it lies.'

'Whatever do you mean, John?'

'I mean that I think she has a liking for some one already.'

'Who can it be, then?' asked Mrs. West in an undecided voice, while a flush passed over her face.

The question was a subterfuge on her part, for she had a shrewd suspicion who her husband alluded to.

'Why, Thomas Penhurst, to be sure; and a more worthy, right-thinking fellow could not be found. If it ever comes to the question, Bessie, do not raise any obstacle, I beg of you. I would rather have Agnes married to him, and happy in his true love, than see her even make such a match as Bella has done.'

Mrs. West gave a deep sigh, as she promised not to interfere. It would be a come-down to all her

ambitious dreams about Agnes; but no matter what might arise, she would keep her word, and take care her other four young daughters looked higher.

Poor woman! her creed was that of the world, worldly. Many mothers, alas! are like her, and care chiefly that their daughters marry the rich and great of the earth, even though they may by doing so be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

But we have wandered from the group who were sitting, in the bright afternoon sunlight, in the Tregarths' cottage. Tea was soon over, and Agnes, now installed in the mysteries of putting the children to bed, stood at the window for a moment to watch the little party cross the moor.

They went in the direction of the shaft, the changing-house, and rough sheds, and then turned off to the pathway that led to St. Low.

The chapel was already filling fast when they got there, and many neighbours passed the Tregarths with a friendly nod.

The miners, in their best clothes, looked very different to the men who spent the week-days underground in mud and mire.

Decent coats, and good soap and water, had made a wonderful change in their exterior; one could hardly have recognised Sam to have been the same man we have described before.

Bluff, honest, and hearty, he strode on among the people, with a nod to this one and a word to that; then he reverently walked up the aisle, and took his place in his own pew, with Annie, Ben, and Harry beside him.

It was a hearty, earnest service, that perhaps might

have surprised any one accustomed to the refined atmosphere of a city church or cathedral.

The singing was a perfect body of sound, solemn from its very power and force; every one, young and old, seemed to join in the familiar tune, and none of those present ever thought of the voices being loud and harsh.

Mr. Bennet was an old man, who only came among the people of St. Low occasionally, yet he understood them perfectly. He only took four words for his text, and they were, 'Fear not, little flock.'

He dwelt on the dangers of a miner's life, and then led their thoughts on from the uncertainty of earthly things to the full contemplation of the safety Christ has promised. With thrilling eloquence, he made them all listen to him in rapt attention, and he touched many a heart that heard him. Annie Tregarth sat, scarcely daring to breathe, lest she should lose any of his teaching; and when the last prayer was over, and the last hymn sung, she rose, feeling comforted and strengthened.

CHAPTER VII.

STILL ABOVE-GROUND.

THEY all came back together,—Sam, Annie, and Harry first, and behind them Ben, walking with Thomas Penhurst, who had joined them on the road.

He had noticed Agnes West's empty seat in chapel, and, having a shrewd suspicion as to her whereabouts, he had been smitten with a sudden desire to walk with Ben as far as his cottage.

He found Agnes sitting by the cradle, softly rocking it, while she sung in a low voice,

> 'Commit thy ways to Him,
> Thy works into His hands,
> And rest on His unchanging word,
> Who heaven and earth commands."'

Making a sign for them to be silent, the little group paused, while Agnes went on to the last verse,

> 'Wait thou His time, the darkest night
> Shall end in brightest day."'

Then, turning round, Agnes saw them all, and rose, with a quick flush on her cheek.

'I have a very good report to give of the children,'

said she, turning to Annie, and ignoring Penhurst altogether. 'Josh has been asleep for a long time, and baby is just gone off. Did you hear Mr. Bennet?'

'Yes, Miss West; and a dear, good man he is. Oh, what a comfort his words were to me! Thank you so much for letting me go.'

Then they talked about the sermon, while Agnes tied on her bonnet and pinned her shawl.

'I will see you safely home, if you will allow me,' said Penhurst meekly; and Agnes added something about little Ben's going also,—'it would be a nice walk for him, she thought.' But Annie stepped forward.

'If you do not mind, Miss West, I think Ben had better not go out again; it is getting late now, and he will have to be up early in the morning.'

Thus it was settled, and Annie looked after the youthful pair as they stepped out in the gathering twilight.

In the west the golden hues were dying away, and fading into tender greens and soft pinks.

A few groups of people were lingering about, or slowly retreating to their homes, for the mining people keep early hours; and before the evening tints had turned to cold greys, and the stars had come glittering out, they would all be within doors, dreaming, perhaps, of the calm Sabbath-day gone by.

Annie and Sam both looked out at the retreating forms of their guests, as they walked side by side, slowly threading their way along; and Annie burst out with a benediction—'God bless and keep them both! What a likely pair they will make!'

Sam's slow perception had not taken in the fact

yet, so he asked, 'Do 'ee think, then, they have a fancy for each other?'

'Do I *think!*—why, I am *sure* of it, Sam. We shall hear of a wedding there before long.'

Sam strained his eyes watching them out of sight, and then gave one of his long chuckling laughs as he turned into the cottage.

'Well, if I ain't glad of it! a likely pair indeed! He's just worthy of her, and she's not a bit too good for him,—that's all I can say for both of them.'

At last the 'chair with wheels' for poor Josh was made.

The price of it was higher than Ben expected; but he did not say a word about that, though it took nearly the whole of his second month's pay.

On the next 'settling-day' he went in the morning with his father to the account house, where Sam again bid for his old pitch.

'It was turning out pretty well,' he said, and he repeated he 'might go further and fare worse.' He was not a-goin' to be caught making a bad bargain for the sake of change, not he, indeed!

Eight sovereigns were handed to him this time, —one more than his last wages mounted to,—so he was very pleased and thankful.

'The old "wumman" will be main glad of this,' said he, with a grateful heart, as he and Ben made their way through the crowd and turned homewards.

'Here's your share, my booy,' and he handed him one of the golden coins.

'Now, may I go to Dick Pierce's about the chair for Josh, father? I didn't like to go till I had all the money to pay for it.'

Consent was given, and he ran off nimbly, arriving at the carpenter's door in a state of breathlessness.

The chair was under the shed, quite dry, but still faintly smelling of fresh paint. 'A neat little tidy article,' the carpenter said, and Ben was ready to indorse his opinion.

It was lightly built, and the wheels went round so easily that guiding it would only be a pleasure, he thought, as he tried it up and down the carpenter's yard.

The price was twenty-five shillings; and as he had only eight left from last month, nearly all his sovereign went in the payment.

However, he did not regret it,—Josh was welcome to the whole if it would do him good; and he pocketed his three shillings and returned home with the chair at full gallop.

Words could not describe the delight of poor Josh at the sight of the pretty bronze-coloured chair; he handled the wheels and examined the seat, thinking he had never seen anything so nice before.

He was all impatience to be out-of-doors in it; and Annie fried some bacon and potatoes, that the boys might have a long afternoon to ramble about as they liked.

A happy little party set out from the cottage on that fine summer afternoon,—Josh lay back in his chair with an old shawl spread over him, feeling quite like a king on his throne.

His bones were growing so bare now, that carrying him in the arms for long together made them ache, and of late he had rather shrunk from going out.

But *that* was all altered now: he leaned back in

the soft cushions, and felt it delightful to be wheeled so rapidly over the ground.

Ben was a capital fellow at guiding the chair, he thought; he went on as though he had been used to it all his life.

Little Harry and Ellen trotted along by their side; and they speedily turned away from the huge wheels, and the scaffoldings, and platforms,—away from the never-ceasing pump, and the numberless tramroads, to a retreat the boys were all fond of.

It was a cool, deep cove under the cliffs, about a mile off. The way down to it was a sloping path, not too steep for the chair; and down this Ben carefully wheeled his brother to the sands below.

Here he found a sheltered position for him under a many-coloured arch of rock, from which heaps of seaweed hung in straggling wreaths.

'Now I'll go and get you some pretty things to play with,' said he cheerily. 'Harry, you come and help me; and Nellie, you stay and take care of Josh.'

'But what pretty things could he get there?' might possibly be asked. There was nothing but piles of huge rocks on either side, and a wide spread of yellow sand between them.

The tide was low, and the emerald water was lazily sending in its little sparkling waves a long way off.

But to a curious eye there were numberless treasures on that bluff Cornish shore,—untold heaps of marvels and wonderful formations.

'Get me a handle for my knife,' called out Josh in his clear, shrill voice.

'All right, I'll cut you a fine one;' and Ben ran down by the rocks to where some huge pieces of 'laminaria' or round oar-weed were to be found.

He selected a piece nearly a yard long, with its broad-fingered frond at the end, and this he brought in triumph to Josh's chair.

He cut a piece off the stem long enough for a knife-handle, and, sticking the tang of the old table knife into it, he pronounced his work accomplished.

'Now, Josh, you mustn't meddle with this, you know; it won't be real hard for a month or two. Don't touch it, and 'twill be as strong and firm as mother's knife-handles.'

Again Ben went on an expedition, and this time he brought some 'mermaids' purses,'—dark, leathery-looking bags they were, that would hold little stones or shells.

Josh had a wild belief that they were the actual purses of the mysterious mermaids he had often heard talk about, and he treasured them accordingly; but in reality they were only the deserted egg-bags of some young skates who had escaped into their watery element, and were now no doubt enjoying life in the deep sea.

Ben brought him pieces of chalky cuttle-fish, looking so white and pure, and feeling so light, that Josh piled them up and wanted more.

Had it been Ben's fortune to find the whole fish, instead of its bones, as they are falsely called, Josh would have had a different feeling towards it; for a more hideous creature could not well be found, with its long arms, its suckers, its prominent great eyes, and its concealed store of black ink. This

latter fluid is rather apt to take one by surprise, for the creature can squirt it out at pleasure.

Ben also found a starfish, that had been tossed up high and dry on the sand. It had five long fingers, at even distances round its body, and a mouth in the very centre of it.

A weak, innocent creature it looked; but those who have watched its habits say it can swallow shell-fish, shell and all, and that it can open oysters for itself in some mysterious way, and dine off the helpless animals.

Again he returned with a dusky-red 'echinus' or sea-urchin, that looked like a starfish folded neatly up, with its mouth grown to an enormous size, and its five sharp teeth protruding out.

These teeth had a property that, if it extended to the human race, would soon banish dentists from the land; for whenever the teeth were injured or worn out by use, there was a provision for replacing them as fast as they were destroyed.

Some of the people boiled these sea-urchins, and ate them like eggs; but of course that sort of thing is a mere matter of taste, and even had Ben wished it, he could not then have found enough of them to boil for supper.

'Now get me some shells,' said Josh imperiously, as he piled his treasures on the top of his old shawl.

Harry was all this time busy at the pools among the rocks. He had found there sprawling green crabs scuttling about, lively shrimps, eatable mussels, and large sea-anemones or actinias.

These latter smooth, slippery creatures he did not look on with any of the respect or admiration of an

enthusiast; he simply called them cows, and treated them accordingly.

'Get me some shells,' called out little Josh again, and Ben ran down to the smooth yellow sand.

Each retreating wave, as it had gone out, had left its half-moon-shaped circle of treasures behind it, and Ben stooped over these traces.

Numbers of empty shells were lying there, deserted by their former tenants, who doubtless had been devoured by some of their numerous foes: empty whelk-shells, large and trumpet-shaped; little white cowries, that Ben had been told were used as money in some countries.

But had this held good in England, Ben would have found mining by far the most profitable occupation, for it took fifteen hundred cowries to make the value of one shilling.

He found numbers of 'livid tops,' spiral and beautiful; plenty of yellow, red, and white 'periwinkles;' cockle shells, white and crimped; and also numbers of the curious razor-shell.

Ben would fain have had a hunt for the razor-fish itself, for now the tide was out, he could see numberless little jets of sand and water rising up, that told him the creatures were lurking somewhere below; but he had no rod to plunge down in search of it, and even if he had been armed with such a weapon, there was no time to use it now.

The sun was travelling towards the west, and had put on its full display of golden glory before it made its final retreat.

A broad bar of reflected gold lay on the water, looking so real and so well-defined, that little Josh

wondered 'if that was the road to heaven, and if holy angels came and went that way.'

'Come, Josh, we must go now. You have a fine heap of things, and some other "settling day" we'll come down here and get more.'

So, tired and satisfied, they all set out for home,—Josh lying back asleep in his chair. It had been a wonderful day to him,—life had had altogether a new meaning, and he liked it much better. 'Perhaps now people would not pity his mother so much because of his being such a burden to her;' and 'perhaps the good Lord would let him stay here a little longer now, to enjoy those beautiful rides in his new chair.'

So thought the poor child that afternoon, as he watched his brothers on the rocks; but, alas! his hopes were vain,—the sand was fast falling out of his hour-glass,—his days were nearing their close.

Annie had a capital tea ready for them. She did not meet her children, as some mothers do, with sharp chiding and querulous rebuke, even when there is no fault of which to complain.

Had this been her habit, Ben would never have developed into the bright, manly little fellow he was fast becoming, and Josh would not have loved her with such a deep, tender love.

Mothers have much in their power in this respect. Too often the fresh young feeling is quenched, the free, brave nature curbed, and the spirit broken, by wrong or too often repeated blame.

Thus Ben lived a kind of double life. 'Above surface,' no one could enjoy the beauties of everything nature spread out for him more than he did. The bright colourings of sunrise and sunset, the blue

sea and piled-up clouds, were a never-ending joy to him.

Till he began to work in the mines, he had never noticed these colourings and grand forms much; but now they were something to dream of while buried in the depths of the earth.

It never entered his head to shrink from his daily work; it came to him as a natural heritage, and he never thought of disputing it, or of wishing for some other more genial trade.

His ancestors on his father's side had been miners for generations back. His grandfather, old Ralph Tregarth, had been killed in the mines years ago, by an unfortunate fall.

One of his uncles had perished at his work by an error in blasting: the fuse had gone off too soon, and he had been blown up with the broken pieces of rock.

Two of his cousins had been killed in mines also.

These accidents were well known, and often talked over; but they no more deterred Sam from making a miner of his son, than the loss of a ship at sea would make a father timid at dedicating his boy to a sailor's life.

There was a true, whole-hearted faith among these Cornish miners that never deserted them, and that nerved them into being the brave, fearless men they really were; and He who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground, and who feeds the ravens, was not unmindful of their trust in Him.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAN POLRYN'S PITCH.

ONE day Sam was hammering away in the mine, waking up echoes from the old tunnel, and Ben was striking at the rock with a fainter touch. Both were so occupied with their strokes, that visitors came on them unawares.

Ben looked up, with his face all wet and muddy, and his chest bare, and saw Thomas Penhurst and Captain West standing beside them.

'Hallo! you're both hard at work, I see,' said Captain West, with a smile, as Ben and his father both laid down their hammers. 'I'm sorry to disturb you; but Penhurst thought Ben would run an errand for me. I don't mean to the "sweet-stuff shop" round the corner, for it would be difficult to find such an establishment down here; but do you think you have "puff" enough to go to surface for me?'

'Oh yes, sir,' said Ben, throwing down his hammer and rising up quickly.

'Stop, stop, man! wait till you get your message. Don't be in too great a hurry. I want you to find Captain Wills, and Captain Bent, and ask them both to come down here.'

'Anything wrong, sir?' asked Sam, as he glanced at Penhurst, who stood a little behind, with an unusually grave and perplexed look on his face.

'Not much the matter,' replied Captain West cheerily; 'but Penhurst here tells me he thinks the men ought to stop working in one of the high tunnels at the south of the mine; he says they are coming too close on the old shaft that hasn't been opened these years past. Do you know that part, Sam?'

'I never worked there, sir; but I always heard tell the old shaft was full of water.'

'That may be; but Dan Polryn and the rest of the men who are working on that pitch say they are far enough from the entrance, and that there is no danger. Penhurst here is the only croaking bird.'

'I think I am justified in my "croaking," sir,' replied Penhurst, stepping forward. 'The water certainly is making the walls very wet just there, and in one or two crevices it is even trickling down; but of course I only give my own ideas of the matter,—you must be guided by wiser heads than mine.'

'We won't talk about the wisdom, Penhurst; we must be guided by experience now, and that's what I want Ben for. Now you find out Captain Wills and Captain Bent. If they are not at their houses, inquire where they are gone, and go after them. We must have a consultation about this matter. I can't let all the responsibility rest on myself.'

'Are the men still working on that pitch, sir?' asked Sam slowly.

'No; I've stopped them for the present, and they are grumbling about it. But if the other captains consider it safe, they may resume their work again.

Come, Penhurst, we will go on some of the other rounds. It will be more than an hour before they can be here.'

Ben was off by this time, and already at the foot of the ladders. He had gained much more courage now in going up and down, and no longer required his father's guidance.

But at the best this 'coming to grass' was a weary business even to the youngest, and Ben was tired enough when he reached the top.

Rapidly throwing off his muddy garb, and hardly waiting to wash his face, he set out for the captains' houses, which were fully half a mile apart.

Of course neither of the gentlemen were at home, and it was nearly an hour before Ben could hunt them out. Then he told the whole story, and they prepared to descend with him.

All three went to the changing-house together, and all three rigged themselves in the same kind of mining costume; for the captains, when they go underground, appear in the same garb as the working men.

Ben could hardly have been blamed had he framed an excuse for staying above-ground. A second descent was not a very usual thing, and his father could not have been angry with him had he pleaded fatigue, and gone home to his mother.

But such a thought never entered Ben's head; he would have spurned such an idea. What! shirk the remainder of his day's work, and leave his father down there to labour alone! Not he indeed!

So he stepped on the ladder with a light skip, before the captains began their descent, and he heard

them puffing and panting on the slimy steps long after he had reached the lowest level.

A long consultation took place at the high tunnel, on the south part of the mine. Sam and Ben dropped their work, and went in that direction also, and men gathered there from various parts, making a goodly company altogether.

Different and conflicting opinions were given. Some said the shaft was much further back than where Dan Polryn and his comrades were working; others said that even if the shaft *was* near, it didn't much matter, for the place was only full of rubbish, and no water there at all.

When Penhurst pointed out the damp and the little trickling streams, Dan Polryn urged 'they were of no account at all; wasn't all the mine wet, more or less? Drops and splashes were constantly falling everywhere,—anybody could see that.'

The miners had come on a good 'lode' in that direction, and numerous hands had found their monthly pay much better in consequence.

They were very averse to having the golden egg snatched out of their grasp by that part of the mine being closed, and arguments about its safety arose long and loud.

The very idea of danger was scouted; and at last all three captains were persuaded, and gave their opinion that the men might go on with their work as usual.

A sudden cheer arose at this decision, that rung through the hollow vaults and tunnels, reverberating along the walls like a clap of thunder, and dying away softly in the distance.

'One cheer more for Cornish mines and Cornish masters!' shouted Dan Polryn, and the sounds burst forth in full force again.

When the last echo had died away, the men resumed their work once more. Dan Polryn chipped a piece of stone off, even nearer the old shaft than he had yet ventured to approach; but this was only a kind of bravery or defiance. When he was alone with his own comrades again, he returned to his old place, and hammered away at the rock he had been cutting when the dispute arose.

The captains returned 'to surface' soon after this, *all* satisfied that they had decided wisely. 'There was not a dissenting voice in the matter,' they said.

Captain West remembered Thomas Penhurst's opinions on the matter, but he set them aside as prejudiced, when so many experienced men thought differently.

But Thomas Penhurst was not satisfied himself.

Of course he could not urge his suspicions before so many older and wiser men than he was, but he did not change his opinions one atom.

He had asserted there *was* danger in working further in that direction, and he saw no reason to withdraw his words. Nay, when the captains were gone above-ground, he even went down to Dan Polryn's 'pitch,' and told them frankly all he thought on the subject.

He spoke kindly and good-naturedly to them, and told them, above all things, not to run any rash hazards for the sake of a little paltry gain.

'Keep on the safe side, Dan, and don't work in that direction any more; don't tap the "old house"

for the sake of working out the vein, or your lives may be the penalty. There *is* water stored up in the shaft, as sure as my name is Thomas Penhurst.'

'All right, sir,' said Dan; 'we doan't want to get too nigh the owld shaft. We do know where to stop, sure enough. Thank 'ee, sir, for warning us.'

'Iss, sir, thank 'ee,' said another man; 'never you be feared for us; we woan't berry ourselves under water.

Penhurst called round by Sam Tregarth's 'pitch' on his way back. There was still a cloud on his brow, for all the arguments of the late consultation had not altered his views, and he felt as a man naturally does when his ideas have gone for nothing.

He had raised a doubt, and the doubt had been listened to, examined, and pronounced without foundation. He had been forced to silence by the higher powers, but his conviction had not changed in the slightest degree.

Sam and Ben were very busy. A successful blasting was just over; the smoke had nearly cleared away, and through the still dim haze Penhurst saw they were examining the ore, and packing an iron truck with the rough pieces.

Penhurst seated himself on a broken heap of stones, and looked on silently for a few minutes. At last he said, 'You didn't go altogether with me, Tregarth?'

'Well, no, sir. I doan't think there's much danger if the lads are careful.'

'But will they be careful?—that's the thing. The greed of gain is an overpowering passion; and if the lode keeps on turning out richly, I fear they will go on undermining, without thinking of the consequence.'

'They should be well watched, sir.'

'Oh yes; I am sure there will be a sharp eye kept on them. But you know, Sam, how little that will avail. Why, a single rash blow from a hammer, a single stroke from a pickaxe, has served before now to open a gap that has flooded a whole mine.'

'Iss, sur, iss; a small hole will let in a great flood. And Dan Polryn and his mates are a grasping lot, sure.'

'They forget the old question that was asked nearly nineteen hundred years ago, Sam, and that countless numbers of our fellow-creatures have answered by their worldly lives and unhappy deaths,—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"'

'Thank God, sur, our mine has escaped so far. Ever since I've been working down here, and that's twenty-five year and more, we've had no great accident.'

'That's true. But there are many parts of the old mine, you know, that have been closed up for years. Either the vein has been all used up, or the ground hasn't been safe for some reason or other. It stands to reason these hollow shafts and tunnels must get filled with water, for there is no escape for the constant moisture; and my theory is, keep as far as possible from encroaching on these places till they can be thoroughly drained. I know the draining could be done, but it would cost some hundreds of pounds at least, and the Company don't seem inclined for such an outlay at present.'

'You are right there, sir,' said Sam, throwing another pile of stones into the truck.

Penhurst took a small, well-worn volume out of his pocket, and turned over the pages. He seldom talked with the miners without reading or quoting a few words from this book. He did not read long chapters or psalms,—for the mine, with its constant noise of work, and its faint lights and deep shadows, was not the place for long readings,—but Penhurst knew where to find sparkling gems in his little book, that shone out alone, and that struck home to the heart, bringing hope and comfort.

He read now, while Sam put in the stones, softly,—'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.'

'That was Luther's favourite psalm,' said he, 'and I never read it without thinking of him. His friend Melancthon and he used to repeat it aloud together whenever some calamity threatened them, and it was always a comfort to their souls. There is one verse of it that I wish we could all take more to ourselves though: "Be still, and know that I am God." If we could say *that* from our hearts, the trials and disappointments of this troublesome life would fall on us more lightly. We should trust our loving Father in heaven more fully.'

Penhurst rose when he had finished speaking, and said he was going to surface.

'We are going up too when we have put this lot in the kibbles,' said Sam. 'I'm going to leave work early to-day.'

'Are you tired, then?'

'No, Mr. Penhurst; but my old woman made me promise I would get up "to grass" soon. She was uneasy-like about our little Josh.'

'What's the matter with him, father?' asked Ben quickly. 'Mother never said a word to me about it.'

'She didn't want to make you uneasy, my booy. I daresay it's nothing. Old women are so fidgety-like,' continued he, turning to Penhurst.

'I'll wait for you then, Sam, and we'll all go up together. I want to go to Jack Ellis's pitch, so I'll meet you at the shaft in half an hour.'

Ben worked nimbly at the loading, and then helped his father to push the heavy truck along the level to the shaft. He was struck with terror about little Josh, and only wished he had known it when he was above-ground at noon. Wouldn't he have run home then? Ay, that he would; and if Josh had been in any danger, he would have stayed with him, and not left him again.

Tears were running down his cheeks as he walked beside his father, pushing the truck with all his might as a kind of help, only lifting his hand every now and then to dash aside the tears that were half blinding him, and making a sticky paste with the red mud on his cheeks.

Poor Ben loved his little brother passionately,—with a deep, unselfish love. The very fatigue and trouble he had had for years past in carrying him about had only seemed to have endeared him more to his true, affectionate heart.

CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE JOSH.

WHEN Thomas Penhurst, with his two companions, entered the cottage door, they all stood in astonishment at the scene before them.

Josh's little crib had been drawn over near the open window of the kitchen, and on the soft white pillow his head was lying, his cheeks rivalling the pillow in its whiteness.

His large blue eyes were turned to the bright afternoon sky, and there, though the sun was pouring down its rays, his gaze had fixed. He could meet the unclouded splendour now, for his sight had grown dim and his life was fast ebbing away. Only a faint heaving of the chest, a tremulous gasp now and then, and a slower and slower breath.

Beside him was his mother, for once without her baby,—the young children had all been carried off by a kind neighbour,—and Annie stood with eager look, bending over her darling, and watching his last struggles. But they could hardly be called struggles. He was passing away as gradually and as placidly as that sun would by and by sink down in the western sky.

Agnes West was also there, with pale cheek and thoughtful brow. She did not move when the door opened, and the whole group remained reverent and silent.

A great Presence was among them, before whom the loftiest head bows and the voice grows hushed.

Poor Josh *would* have the blind drawn aside, and he *would* gaze out at the light when his sight was waning. He had repeated bits of hymns, and talked in a half-delirious way about 'holy angels' and 'beautiful music,' as the shadow of death came over him; so that the women who had been watching him wondered, and thought that perhaps some glimpses of his coming blessedness might have been revealed to him.

Who knows of the visions that come when heaven is near, when its soft airs are wafted over the escaping soul? Who knows what the change is when the emancipated spirit is leaving the body, with its aches, and worries, and sins, and is going where no human eye can follow it?

None have come back to tell us. It is a grand secret that death only can reveal.

Enough for us to feel that our Saviour, the 'God-man,' has passed through the awful portals of the grave, and that He has taken the sting away.

Henceforth, for those that love Him and walk in His way, death is but a 'going home' to the new Jerusalem, and to the many mansions He has prepared for His faithful ones.

Presently, with a great sob, Annie bent down over the pillow and laid her hand gently on the opened eyes, and then they knew all was over.

Ben's voice rose in a pitiful wail, for he was still boy enough to cry aloud when any great trouble swept over him; and for a minute or two even Sam wept with great heavy throbs of grief, while Annie covered her eyes with her apron.

Agnes had turned to the window, and was evidently trying to hide her emotion. She whispered,—

'When, soon or late, this feeble breath
No more to Thee shall pray,
Support *me* through the vale of death,
And in the darksome way.'

'Let us pray,' said Penhurst suddenly, and then they all knelt round the little crib on the uncarpeted floor, while the young man poured out an earnest, impassioned prayer that they all might be ready when the time came for them to die.

It was the highest blessing he could ask for each of them, for it included a holy life and a soul redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

It included a safe voyage over the waves of this weary world, where so many are shipwrecked for want of a sure anchor, and a joyous passage over Jordan into the harbour of eternal rest.

'Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life be past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last!'

A very few days after this, little Josh was laid in the burial-ground of the chapel at St. Low, and the next Sunday many a one paused as they came inside the gates, to take a look at the little freshly-made mound.

'He was a "poor cripple," and never likely to

have set a foot to ground,' whispered one woman to another.

'Then I'm sure it was a happy release for him, and a good thing for his poor mother too,' was the reply, as they passed on into the chapel.

But Annie did not think so of her boy: she would fain have had him still with her,—lameness, ailments, and all. Her love still clung close and fast to the poor child, and she mourned for him with a sincere grief.

Ben also could not forget him; he used to pause on Sundays at the grave, and he watched every blade of grass as it peeped up through the red earth. The chapel burial-ground was no romantic or picturesque place, planted, as some of the cemeteries are, with bright flowers and graceful trees.

It was as bare and blank a spot as could well be found, crowded with humble graves and rough tombstones.

But many a pathetic history was traced on those very stones; and a curious observer might read out a whole life-story in the often ill-spelt words and rugged rhymes.

They told of some who had gone down at sea, when the floods had 'compassed' them about, and the 'billows and the waves had passed over them.'

They told of others, young and old, who had come to their death in the depths of the dark mine, whose souls had gone out in the midst of horrors and gloom.

And they told of those whom accident had disabled, and sent to a premature grave.

Only the children and the old women of the village

seemed to have 'no history,' and slept without a long narration of their deeds.

It might be imagined that the knowledge of so many cut off in their youth and prime would have been a source of terror to those who were daily exposed to the same dangers. But this was not the case. The brave Cornish men and boys read the names as they passed through the grim burial-ground, and never paused to wonder how soon their own might be added to the number.

No trees waved over the graves, and the noise of the crashing hammers and the whirling machinery came there faintly; and, still more mellowed by distance, came the roar and murmur of the ever-sounding ocean.

Ben met Thomas Penhurst one afternoon on a settling-day. He had been out gathering milk-thistle and other weeds for his rabbits. He had his arms full of them, and little Harry trotted along by his side carrying a bundle also. It was a supply for several days, for Ben had not time in the mornings to gather them.

'Where are you going when you have fed your rabbits?' asked Mr. Penhurst pleasantly.

'I am going to Dick Pierce the carpenter's,' replied Ben, with a grave face. 'He says he'll take that chair with the wheels back again for half-price —Josh don't want it now, you know, sir.'

'No, indeed, Ben; his infirmities and troubles are over for ever now,—he is safe with Jesus.'

Ben's eyes filled with sudden tears. He had not got over his grief yet, and could hardly bear to speak of his dead brother.

'I was thinking about Josh before I went to bed last night, Ben.'

'Were you indeed, sir?'

'Yes; and I wrote a few lines about him that you may have if you like. I don't mean to say they are exactly applicable to poor little Josh, but he suggested the thought, and therefore you have a right to the rhyme if you choose. It is called 'The mother's Wish.'

A mother knelt in the twilight fair,
Morning and eve rose her earnest prayer,
'Guard, O my Father, my darling son,
Pure in Thy sight may his days be run;
Guard him for ever from care and sin,
Grant that all bright things his life may win;
And the truest gifts that Thy hands bestow,
Grant that my loved one, my boy, may know.'

But the mother saw with a sorrowing eye,
As day after day glided slowly by,
That a shade had passed o'er her gentle child,
Though beauteous as ever in love it smiled:
Its head drooped down, like a weary flower
Fading away in the morn's bright hour;
Its deep blue eye had a meaning strange,
And its tender beauty all wore a change.

Fairer and fairer that boy looked now,
With its holy smile and its placid brow;
By a faint expression of untold things,
By the with'ring touch of death's icy wings,
By the last deep struggle within its breast,
The boy's bright spirit has passed to rest.
And oh! so gently it fled at last,
The mother knew not its life had passed.

And then in her sorrow, so dark and wild,
She knew not the voice that had called her child,—
That called it from sorrow and earthly sting,
To an angel's crown and an angel's wing;
But the rays of mercy, with holy light,
Came with bright beams to her spirit's night,
And at last she knew that in heaven her prayer
Had won a place for her darling there.

'Oh, I like them so much!' said Ben, when Penhurst stopped reading. 'May I show them to mother?'

'Yes, I've no objection; the thought may be a soothing one to her, though I cannot say much for the rhyme. After you have been to the carpenter's, Ben, you may as well come on to my house. You shall have some fresh honey I have had sent me, and I will show you my new microscope.'

Oh, the untold delight of this prospect for Ben! It was a glimpse of pleasure such as rarely came to his lot.

Thomas Penhurst lived in part of an old rickety house in St. Low's; and the woman who, with her husband, occupied the rest of the premises, waited on him and administered to his domestic needs.

Not that they were many. 'No one could give less trouble than Mr. Penhurst,' she used to say; 'and he had always a kind word for everybody.'

But though the rooms were plainly furnished, Ben saw many things there that seemed specially beautiful and curious to him,—large books with numberless pictures, pots of rare flowers and graceful ferns, paintings round the room, and a neat carpet on the floor.

They were luxuries Ben had not been accustomed to, and he appreciated them accordingly.

The little round table was drawn up close to the window, which was thrown open, and the splash of the sea sounded pleasantly a short way off.

A large piece of honey, dripping from the comb, was placed on the table in a dish, and seemed to have brought the sweet perfume of the Devonshire flowers with it.

New white bread, and some tea in an old brown teapot, completed the repast.

Mr. Penhurst poured out the tea, talking pleasantly, and making Ben merry with the anecdotes he told him. He took as much trouble to amuse the miner's boy as he would have done had he been a much richer or grander guest.

Though Penhurst was in a plain sphere, and had plain duties to perform in his daily life, he was a thorough gentleman at heart, and had grand, unselfish thoughts of things. He was thoughtful, staunch, and sure, but troubled with a shyness that kept him back in more cases than one.

When tea was over, and Ben had demolished a pile of bread and honey that would have astonished any one but a miner, Penhurst took out the microscope, and Ben was for the first time introduced to the marvels of the world that lie beyond the unassisted human eye.

How little we know of what is around and about us! What wonders lie at our very feet, and we have not power to discern them!

At our very best, we see in a 'glass darkly.' Our vision is dim, and our senses are dull; but the deeper we go, the more we learn of our beneficent Creator, and of the beautiful creation He has surrounded us with.

Ben saw insects magnified that seemed to have grown into giants in the process. He saw an unfortunate fly taken to pieces, and its different parts were explained to him. Such feet! such lovely gauzy wings! and such eyes! He felt infinitely more respect for the despised race than he had ever felt before.

Penhurst showed him petals of flowers, veins of leaves, and drops of ditch-water, with its numberless curious inhabitants. It was altogether a striking revelation of an unknown sphere to Ben, and he was deeply impressed with it.

It would be something to ponder over when down in the dark mine to-morrow,—a glimpse of wonderland that he would not forget for many a day.

He was sorry when Penhurst put away the slides and closed the box.

'You shall come again some other day, Ben, as you like it so much. I am going to arrange some new slides with bits of coralline, and we will have a peep at some medusas and flustras.'

CHAPTER X.

BEN FINDS A PRIZE.

IT was nearly sunset when Ben set out for home, and Mr. Penhūrst said he would go part of the way with him. So they went round by 'Sandy Hill,' where the rays of the setting sun were falling on the new house.

The workmen had made a great advance since the last evening Ben had looked at it with Thomas Penhurst. Now the roofing was finished and the window-frames were put in. The garden had been turned up, and crops of seed were already peeping up through the red soil.

'That is your Utopia, sir,' said Ben, looking up at the house as they passed.

'What a memory you have, Ben!' said Penhurst, laughing. 'You ought to have forgotten my silly speech before this time. I must be careful what I say before you.'

'Was it a silly speech, sir?' asked Ben.

'Well, yes, it was,' replied Penhurst thoughtfully, and he walked on for some distance in silence.

This new house had been a speculation of a miner

who had been unusually fortunate in one of the mines, and who had invested his savings in house building. Now he was in search of a tenant for the place, and Penhurst had been looking at it with an eager eye.

'I should like that house above all things,' he had often said to himself; 'it is capable of being made a capital investment. Why, the garden alone would supply a good share of fruit and vegetables, and the rooms are so neat and well pitched.'

But when he got thus far in his meditations, his thoughts would generally lose their coherency, and he would rush off into wild day-dreams, as he thought of a fair, well-loved figure flitting about those rooms, and filling the whole place with life and joy.

Oh, if that dream could only be realized, he would deem himself one of the happiest of men, and the Cornish moorlands would seem a very Eden to him!

'Who is that on before us, Ben?' asked he, with a sudden start.

'It is Miss West,' replied Ben quickly.

Mr. Penhurst need not have asked the question, for he knew the soft-looking grey dress, the white hat with green ribbons, and the slight, active figure well enough. No other woman in the world seemed so good and so beautiful to him; and yet, though she was seldom out of his thoughts, there was no one with whom he was so shy and unlike himself.

This man, who was one of the bravest in places of danger, whose energy and daring were well known among the underground workers, was yet timid as possible in the presence of the young lady, and old Captain West was beginning to think he had been

mistaken in the idea he had taken into his head of there existing an attachment between him and his daughter.

They soon overtook Agnes, for she was walking slowly, enjoying the pleasant evening; and when Penhurst spoke, she looked up at him with a bright, happy smile.

'I was on my way to your house, Ben,' said she, turning to him, and holding out a small basket of ripe apples. 'I was going to take these to little Ellen; but you can carry them to her now, and say I sent them.'

'Won't you come on a little farther?' asked Thomas timidly.

'I think not. It's getting late now; the evenings are growing much shorter. No; I will send the apples and go back. Good night, Ben; good night, Mr. Penhurst.'

But he turned also. He walked by her side on the path, and began talking of commonplace things in a voice that grew unsteady. Both of them felt a consciousness of hidden thoughts, that gave their words a deeper meaning, and the thoughts came out at last. They had turned towards a corner of the moor, near which the work-people from the sheds were trooping along, poor things! They had been busy all day at their various occupations; some had been washing the refuse of the tin, some sorting the unpleasant-looking mass,—'spalling,' 'buddling,' 'jigging,' or 'trunking,' as they severally called their work. The soil of the red mud still hung on their dress and faces, yet they trooped along, merry and happy, all returning to their quiet homes.

It was talking about them that loosened Thomas

'They stood for a minute hand in hand on the moor, looking beyond the groups of people to the calm sea and the western skies.'—THE MINER'S SON, *page 103.*

Penhurst's tongue at last. He spoke of happiness as a thing of the heart, not tethered down to outward circumstances,—a God-given, holy blessing. And then—he never knew how—his words turned to the hopes of happiness he had dreamed of, and Agnes listened with a flushed face.

There was little romance in their outward surroundings. Nothing could be more realistic than the crowded moor, with the hoarse pump soughing for ever in their ears, and the huge hammer still pounding away at the hard ore.

But here the beginning of their new life sprang up. Agnes had listened to his passionate pleading, and had given him a promise that at some future time their hopes and their interests should merge together.

They stood for a minute hand in hand on the moor, looking beyond the groups of people to the calm sea and the western skies, in which the fading rays of sunset still lingered, and their thoughts rose heavenward, even in that first flush of happiness.

But we must return to Ben, who the very next day made a discovery that was not without results. He knew the dark regions of the mine perfectly now, for his was a mind that would not be satisfied with a mere cursory investigation. He could traverse the rugged levels, and swing himself down by the chains into the lowest depths. He knew every beam in the place, and could count the winzes. With a candle stuck in his hat, he plunged into yawning chasms his father never thought of examining. Every day brought him fresh knowledge; for while his father was boring the blasting holes, he generally used to set out on his journeys.

It was not unprofitable work, for it gave him an insight into the capabilities of the place that would serve him in any case of emergency.

He knew the pitches where the various men worked, and would often stop to have a chat with them. Dan Polryn, in particular, was often honoured with a visit. This latter worthy was still hard at work near the old shaft. Five men formed his 'pare,' and they daily loaded their trucks and sent masses of rich ore up to surface. It was the best 'lode' that had been worked that year, and many of the other miners were rather inclined to envy Dan's good fortune. They would fain have outbidden him on the next settling day, but he stuck to the lot, and was already paying fifteen shillings for each pound's worth of ore he sent to the surface.

One day Ben had been diving down in a low level, and discovered a piece of ore that was lying half-hidden by some rock. He dug it out with his pick-axe, and when his wanderings were over he carried it to his father. Very pretty the little broken mass looked, for it flashed every colour in the candle-light.

Sam glanced over it critically, a grim smile on his face. 'Where did 'ee git this, Ben?'

'Down in the level under this, father.'

'At the west side?'

'Yes, as it might be over there,' said Ben, pointing with his pickaxe in the direction named.

'Then I must have a look at the place. You come and show us, Ben.'

Down they plunged through a dark, narrow opening, where planks of wood lay here and there across, from which they swung themselves from side to

side. Sam went down on his knees, his nose nearly touching the ground, as he examined underneath and around the rock. It was a close, damp place, much more confined than the level above. The candles burnt dim, and almost threatened to go out altogether, yet still Sam glanced round the place with a look of satisfaction.

'Here's another bit of the same kind of ore, sure enough,' said he, chipping off a piece, 'and there's plenty more too—good "peacock ore." It's just the vein I've been looking for so long. The strata has dropped down to a lower level, that's all, and I'll be at it again before long.' This he said half to himself, for he did not choose to tell Ben his opinions till he saw a chance of carrying them out.

'Come along, my booy,' exclaimed he, when he had quite satisfied himself. 'Come along. I shall bid for this pitch next time; so perhaps we shall soon be changing our workshop.'

Sam *did* bid for it when the time came round, and many of the men looked at him with surprise. He was giving up a tolerable 'pitch,' for which he was paying twelve shillings for a pound's worth of ore, and going to a close, low part of the mine, that had been deserted for years.

'Don't 'ee be a fool,' exclaimed Harry Prideaux, who stood near him. 'Be 'ee really going to give up your old pitch?'

'Iss, that I shall,' replied he. 'A man wants a change of air sometimes.'

'Even if it's for the worse? Well, then, I shall bid for your old pitch, mind you that.'

'All right, man, I've no objection; but I wouldn't

give more than twelve shillings for it, if I were you.'

But when the time came, and the manager read out the various pitches and 'sett' them, Harry found he had to pay fourteen shillings, while Sam got off with only eight.

Such was the relative value fixed on the two parts of the mine, and people looked after Sam, thinking he had gone 'daft' in making such an exchange.

Ben and he went to their new quarters the next day, and, as far as outward circumstances went, the change was not for the better. The heat was terrible, for they were far away from any winze, and a good distance from the narrow aperture by which they came down. The uneven roof was very low, and the feeling much more like a vault than anything else. However, Sam was not the one to be baffled with difficulties. He began a deep bore at once, while Ben held the candle in a slanting direction to make it burn better. At the end of two hours the hole was finished and the fuse lighted.

'Come up to our old shop now, Ben,' said his father; 'it will be rather close down here when the blasting goes off, I reckon.'

So they climbed up and paid a visit to Harry Prideaux, who was just going to 'kroust.' They immediately drew out their pasties and joined him; and while sitting on the rough stones there, they heard the loud reverberations of the blasting below.

'That's our boring,' said Sam, as the echo died slowly away. 'How loud it do sound, to be sure! That's a terrible close place down there.'

'Ay, that it is, Sam, and I don't envy you your

bargain,' exclaimed Prideaux. 'However, *I* shouldn't complain, as I gained by it.'

'It's done, and it can't be helped,' said Sam, rising. 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating. And now, Ben, we'll go below; the smoke's cleared away by this time. Come along, lad.'

Away they went into an atmosphere still thick with the lingering smoke, and that made them cough violently; but miners are used to such discomforts, and they went on to the shattered rock.

'I b'leeve this *is* worth finding,' said Sam, as he examined the broken pieces. 'Lots of copper here, my booy—as keenly a lode as ever I see'd. Get a truck, Ben; we must blast another hole to-day, my man. This is something like.'

By this it will be seen that Sam's expectations were realized, and *more* than realized. His gains for the next month were doubled, and trebled the month after. Prosperity had dawned on the Tregarths at last, and the humble household did not forget to thank the Giver of earthly good for the benefit bestowed on them. Still there were great drawbacks, that took away the full enjoyment of the prosperity. The bad air began to tell on them both,—the 'cold-damp,' as the miners called it, was very trying to bear. Ben could scarcely stand at first when he came to the surface; and at last they were obliged to knock off work an hour earlier than they used to do when on the higher level.

Many comforts flowed in to the Tregarths' cottage in consequence of their prosperity, and Annie's heart was made glad. She had grown, in many respects, more cheerful than she used to be, and had a firmer,

brighter hope. Many things had conspired to bring about this improvement. The days of hard poverty were over with them now. Madge Burnet's bills were all paid, and there was a tidy sum lying in the Savings Bank in Sam's name. He had also insured in a sick club; so that if slack pay came again, or sickness visited him, there would be something to fall back on.

'But these are mere trifles,' some one might say.

Are they, though? Let those who think so bear for a while the worry and anxiety of having many mouths to feed and nothing to put in them. Let them have little ones to clothe, and not know where to get the money to buy the clothes with. Let them have these, and a hundred other wants, and they will ever in future pity the poor, hard-worked, anxious mother in such a case.

Another cause had had its influence with Annie,—the death of little Josh. He had gone to be with Jesus, and her thoughts loved to follow him there. The eternal world seemed nearer and more real to her, as it always does to those who mourn over the first death in their family.

Agnes West took a great deal of notice of Annie. Scarcely a week passed but she would talk to her or read to her, as the case might be; and intercourse with one so sensible and religious had a great effect on Annie.

She had grown stronger in faith just when that quality was most required; for a trouble was hanging over her,—a cloud, small at present as a man's hand, but it was gathering up, and one cold winter's afternoon it burst over her devoted head.

CHAPTER XI.

MISFORTUNES IN THE MINE.

A COLD day in January; snow had been falling at intervals for nearly a week, and it had drifted in heaps to the sheltered places, where the red water from the ore-washings could not melt it away.

The bleak moor was a scene of desolation and puddle, and the women and children ran to and fro from the sheds as quickly as possible, without stopping to gossip on the way.

No more pleasant dinner-parties for them in the open air now; no more cheerful gatherings on the edge of the moor, where merry laughter and careless glee made their humble meal as enjoyable as a costly banquet.

The poor, shivering creatures crowded together in the drying-house, or in the blacksmith's shop, with half-frozen limbs, wet feet, and sloppy, grimy dresses. The climate of Cornwall is mild enough in sheltered places, but on that exposed moor the cold seemed to concentrate and expend its forces.

A short way off, the sea looked even more desolate than the land; for the full fury of a gale was sweep-

ing over it, and tossing the waves into great mountains of froth and foam.

No boats passed to and fro now. Even the hardy pilot would refuse to venture to sea in such weather. 'A westerly storm,' the old sailors said, 'right in from the Atlantic, you see.' It was certainly a sublime sight, when the snow-storm cleared off a little, and the huge waves could be seen tumbling in, and sending their spray half-way up the cliffs; but the poor surface-workers did not appreciate it, or pause to admire the scene of nature's wrath.

For those down in the mine the weather did not matter much,—summer or winter was all alike to them. When they had stepped down the ladder out of sight of the sky above, the heat grew greater and greater as they descended, till it became almost tropical in its intensity. The wind might howl its loudest among the machinery above, and the thunder even might send forth its deepest crashes, without disturbing the miner; not the faintest sound of a tempest could reach him down there.

Dan Polryn and his 'pare' were working away with more determination than ever. They had been very successful indeed; and this very success, instead of satisfying them, had only urged them on to try to get more. This is generally the case with more clever men than even the 'knowing' Dan was. The 'greed of gain' is exacting in its nature; it grows and increases, and never knows when to cry out, 'Enough! enough!'

It was all very well while the vein ran on away from the old shaft; there was no danger in using the hammer and pickaxe then. But when, by a

sudden turn, it lay directly up to the rough parting wall, it was time to stop, and give up the pursuit. One of the men, Bill Hunter, warned Dan Polryn of the danger, and urged him to pause.

'You'll tap the "auld house," I tell 'ee, before long. Bide where you be, and doan't try no more.'

'Ha, ha! Bill Hunter's afeard! Go to "um," poor cheeld! go to your mother! I knows what I'm about, doan't I, though? There's no danger, man, I tell 'ee.'

And he gave a fiercer blow with the pickaxe, turning out what was indeed splendid ore. A little more of that stuff, and his receipts this month would reach forty pounds, or more.

Hunter watched him with a doubtful look on his grim, muddy face. The ore was good; they had hit on the right vein, and he, as one of the 'pare,' would come in for his share of the profits; but he could see the danger they were running. He had heard Mr. Penhurst's opinion on that subject, and his warnings too often, to be at all in doubt.

Even now a tiny rill of water was trickling down at the very spot Dan's pickaxe had last struck; so he argued the point with him long and loud. The other men joined in the discussion also, with words and expressions that would be perfectly unintelligible to any but a dweller in the district, and it was soon evident that Bill Hunter was getting the worst of it.

The other men would not be persuaded—'not they, indeed!' Their cupidity had swallowed up all their other feelings,—even fear itself was secondary to the fierce desire for more money.

At last Bill Hunter flung his hammer and pickaxe

over his shoulder, took his candle from its position on the wall, moulded a piece of red clay, and fixed his candle with it in the front of his cap.

'Where be goin', man?' shouted Dan.

'Up "to grass." I shall tell Mr. Penhurst what I think, and ask him to come down and see about it, ay, that I will!' And he trudged away, followed by a volley of jeers and loud laughs, that echoed through the tunnels like the rejoicings of some evil spirits at their revels.

Bill Hunter did not turn round to answer them. He walked on steadily, bowing his head when the tunnel was low, and turning aside at the winzes, till the sounds of his late companions were growing faint in his ears, and he could distinguish the blows of their pickaxes and their hammers going on again.

Alas, that was the last sound he ever heard from them! He had not gone up many fathoms of the ladders when a wild rush broke on his ears, that made him pause for a moment to listen, and then urged him on in his ascent like a madman. He reached the surface half dead with fright and exertion, and the moment he recovered his breath he told the tale to the eager listeners.

'The "old house" has given way, and the water's in on the mine!'

Rapid confirmation was given to his report, for other men came rushing up the ladder as quickly as possible. Without tools or candles, with their jackets unfastened, and the perspiration running down their bare chests, their very looks of terror and distraction told the tale. Faster and faster they came up, each one safe and trembling, while terrible sounds

raged below. The roar of waters echoing through the vaults, and the sound of terrible shrieks, blanched the cheeks of the listeners, and almost transfixed them with horror.

Then the miners began to reach the surface more slowly and in fewer numbers; and each man, as he came, bore frightful proofs of the struggles he had passed through. Some were bleeding from wounds in the head, caused by their scramble through the rushing torrent, that bore in its fierce course huge pieces of stone, barrows, tools, and other moveable articles; some of the men had their arms and hands injured; and all were dripping with vile, muddy water.

An immense crowd had assembled round the shaft of the mine. People came flocking from all directions as soon as the news spread that there was trouble below. Screaming women and frightened children swelled out the crowd, and blocked up the way.

Thomas Penhurst, who had been busy above-ground all the morning, was quickly on the spot, and the captains of the mine soon appeared. Captain Bent had been down in the tunnels only an hour before, and crafty Dan Polryn had then turned his blows in another direction, quite away from the shaft, and had thus kept him from any suspicion that he was encroaching too near with his work.

A regular plan of relief for the sufferers was established at the top of the mine. A doctor was soon on the spot, to decide what should be done in each case. Women brought small cases of brandy, and gave some drops to the half-fainting men as they came up, until at last the arrivals ceased, and no more drooping figures rose in sight.

Then came the call of names; and as each of the men answered, a kind of tumult of rejoicing spread in the crowd; but when there was no reply, a sound of horror and wailing rose.

Harry Prideaux and his 'pare,' who had taken Sam Tregarth's old pitch, all answered to their names cheerily.

From being in a level tolerably easy of access, and also near the shaft, they escaped without difficulty, even saving their tools, and bringing them up to surface also. But Dan Polryn and all his comrades were missing; only Bill Hunter escaped of that 'pare,' and he was the one who told the tale, and could give an exact account of the cause of the catastrophe.

He became a great man on the spot, was consulted by the captains, and crowded on by the women, who all shrieked for news of the missing ones.

Sam Tregarth and Ben were absent, and there was a solemn silence when their names were called; only one wild cry was heard, and that came from poor Annie, who stood with her baby in her arms, and with Ellen and Harry clinging trembling to her skirts.

Thomas Penhurst made his way to her at once, and she clung to his arm with a desperate burst of agony.

'Go home, Mrs. Tregarth,' said he firmly; 'you can do no good here. I pity you from my heart; but there is no occasion for despair. The poor fellows may be safe enough for what we know at present. Go home, I entreat of you, and I will send you the earliest news.'

Annie turned away silently, with a wild look of hopelessness in her face, and Mr. Penhurst glanced

after the little group as they went slowly through the deep mud and falling sleet. Then, with a sudden thought, he called an old woman towards him.

'Will you go to Captain West's house, and ask Miss West, from me, if she will call at Sam Tregarth's cottage? Say poor Mrs. Tregarth is sadly in need of her just now.'

'That was the best thing I could do for her,' thought he, as he returned to the scene of action. 'Agnes will be such a comfort to her. No one knows better how to act than she does in times of affliction, and I fear there is very deep affliction in store for poor Mrs. Tregarth.'

There were nine other men also missing, making in all fifteen names not accounted for.

Some of the women whose husbands and sons were safe began to disperse now, and set off for their cottages, clinging to their dear ones with expressions of joy at having them near.

But a little group still gathered round the shaft, whose despairing looks told their story. They anxiously watched all the means that were employed to clear the mine, listening earnestly for fresh news, and sobbing bitterly when hope seemed to be growing less.

The pump was hard at work, and a number of men had been told off for a boring operation. Everything that human skill could devise under the circumstances was put in action; but many hours must necessarily elapse before the greedy, rushing water could possibly be got rid of.

Still the poor women lingered on the spot, though the fierce wind was blowing the fast-falling sleet

into their faces, and though the half-frozen mud was benumbing their feet.

Thomas Penhurst threw open the door of the cleaning-house for the poor shivering creatures; and some of them went in there, where they sat crouching on the floor, with bowed heads and bitter sobs, starting out, however, and rushing to the shaft when any unusual stir was heard among the men.

None but the children and sick people went to bed that night of all the numbers who worked in the 'Northern Wheal' mine. It was an anxious, terrible time, and the cold winter's night wore away before any tidings were heard.

Agnes West went to Mrs. Tregarth's cottage as soon as the message reached her. She put on her warm wraps and furs, and walked quickly down the muddy road, with the sleet half blinding her; for, to carry an umbrella in that storm was a thing impossible.

It was very fortunate she went there, for poor Annie was just giving up as she went in. A faintness had come over her, and she was lying back in her chair, with the children crying in fright round her.

Agnes brought her restoratives, and when her wandering senses had returned, she persuaded her to lie down. Then Miss West proceeded to make herself as useful as possible under the circumstances.

She put sticks in the fire and made the kettle boil, gave the children their suppers, and put them all to rest, rocking the baby's cradle, as was the orthodox custom in those regions, till the little blue eyes closed, and a sweet slumber came over the child.

After that she made poor Annie take some tea,

and sat beside her during the long watches of that weary night. At times Annie would rouse herself, and try in her wild despair to rush out of the house, to learn news at the shaft; but her strength soon spent itself, and she would again fall back half fainting on the bed.

It was a night Agnes could never forget. She felt deeply sorry for the poor bereaved wife and mother, whose case seemed so terribly sad, and she felt anxious on her own account also. Her father was at the mine, exposed to all the inclemency of the weather, and Thomas Penhurst was with the boring party. He was her affianced husband now; and she knew, wherever danger was, he would be sure to be in the very midst of it, and she was perfectly right in her judgment of him. Once during the night she heard a low knock at the door, and she ran with a throbbing heart to open it.

Mr. Penhurst stepped in over the threshold, his face pale, and his clothes wet and covered with mud.

'Don't come near me,' said he, laughing, and looking down at his dripping garments. 'I've only one minute to spare, but I ran away as quickly as I could, to tell you the boring has answered splendidly; the water is clearing out of the mine as fast as possible.'

'Do you think there is any hope for the poor fellows down there, Thomas?' asked she quickly.

Mr. Penhurst shook his head. 'I hardly think there can be; it would be a perfect miracle if any one should be saved,—the water has made a clean sweep through the mine,—but we are going down to see presently.'

'Who is going down?'

'Your father, about a dozen men, and myself. You shall have the earliest news. How is poor Annie getting on? How is she bearing it?' asked he, pointing to the door of the other room.

'She is in a most depressed state of mind, and has been going from one fainting fit to another. Poor Annie is not strong,' replied Agnes.

'She has not a brave, trusting heart like you have, my darling. May God in His mercy keep you always strong in His strength!'

He stood for a moment looking at Agnes with that deep, tender gaze of his, and then, with a parting 'good-bye,' he was off again, as suddenly as he had come, into the dark, stormy night.

Annie Tregarth heard the door close, and was half starting from the bed when Agnes went into the room.

'Who was that?' she called out wildly; 'is there any news? Tell me the worst, Miss West, or I will go off to the mine at once. Are they both dead, my brave husband and my noble boy?'

Agnes went over towards the bed, and took Annie's hand soothingly. 'You must try and be calm,' said she gently. 'There is no news of them yet; but Mr. Penhurst has been here to say the mine is clear of water now, and my own dear father and he are just going down. Annie, *they* do not shrink from danger, —they are ready to risk their lives to help the poor men down there; and do you think *we* ought to spend the time in vain distrust and useless repinings?'

'No, indeed, Miss West,' said the poor woman, smoothing back her hair and rising from the bed;

'no, indeed! We ought to pray for them,—for your good father, for Mr. Penhurst, and for them all. I ought to have thought of that before. Oh, my weak faith! Oh, my poor, doubting heart!'

And she flung herself by the bedside, and poured forth a strain of passionate words, half incoherent at first, but gradually getting more collected, as peace dawned on her troubled soul.

What a long, weary night that seemed! The wind howled outside, and the sleet drove against the windows, but Annie and Agnes watched and waited. Sometimes Agnes read a verse or two in her low, sweet voice, and sometimes Annie whispered a short prayer, as the time passed.

The children meanwhile slept peacefully on, unconscious of the anxious watching that was going on round them.

But we must return to Sam Tregarth, who with his son was just examining a mass of blasted rock and picking out the ore, which Sam having looked at, he nodded his head wisely to Ben, and pronounced it a 'keenly-looking lot.'

Ben was filling a barrow with the gathered-up pieces, and ranging them in neat strata, the largest ones at the bottom, when he started and said, 'What noise is that, father?'

It might have seemed an unnecessary question, for a hundred noises were going on round them,—hammers were falling with heavy blows at the various 'pitches,' pickaxes were driving at the softer ground, chains were clanking as heavy buckets of ore were drawn up through the winzes, the kibbles were rattling up and down, the pump was gasping with its

usual spasmodic throbs,—yet through all this confusion, that seemed an almost indistinguishable clatter of sounds, Ben detected a noise that he did not understand, and that he had never heard before.

Sam Tregarth knew it well, though; he had heard it once a long time ago, and the remembrance of such a sound seldom leaves the memory.

It was a long, loud rush, that grew more and more distinct, and swelled out, echoing through all the vaults and tunnels like a prolonged peal of thunder.

A whirl of wind like a tempest was forced down the winzes, and Sam threw down his tools, exclaiming, 'The water's in on us! I'll lay Dan has tapped the old house.'

Three men came flying along to where they stood, their candles extinguished, and their looks terror-stricken.

We're cut off, Sam; the water's pouring down the winze! What can we do? There's no escape!' cried one of them.

As he gasped the words out, the torrent came sweeping down, tearing everything moveable away with it.

They were all swept off their legs and dashed about in the foaming water, when little Ben made a leap, and caught hold of a projecting piece of the wall. 'Come in here, father,' said he, plunging into a side vault. Sam followed, and two of the other men managed to get in also.

'There's a large shelf in here, father,' gasped Ben, 'we might get up on it, perhaps;' and he led the way to a little retreat he had discovered in one of his exploring journeys.

It was a deep ledge of rock near the roof of the vault, not difficult of access. Ben had often perched himself there for mere pastime; and he climbed up there now, followed as before by the two men and his father.

There was room for them all, and for half a dozen more, could they have reached it.

They all drew themselves up out of the rushing water, and began to breathe, and feel themselves in comparative safety.

'Where is Ned Hill?' asked one of the new-comers, when he saw only two of the 'pare' were safe.

His companion looked out at the black flood and shook his head. There was no need of any reply. No human life could have stood the rush, that was now increasing every moment.

They soon began to find that, though the torrent rushed outside them with increasing force and depth, their corner was out of the direct course, and the flood passed by without touching the little recess in which their shelf was situated.

'Praise the Lord for that!' said Sam solemnly; and then he added, 'Oh, my God, let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. Hear me, O Lord, for Thy loving-kindness is good.'

The men both bowed their heads as he spoke, and Ben thought the verse must have been written on purpose for them; but that is the case in every extremity.

There is hardly a crisis in life but there are texts to meet it; scarcely a dispensation that Providence

sends but there are words to strengthen us in the midst.

'That's a sharp booy of yourn, Sam,' said Harry Smith; 'but for him, we should have been driven on like poor Ned Hill. You've saved us so far, my lad,' said he, turning to Ben; 'there's a chance for us yet, if we can only hold out long enough.'

But it was terrible to sit there in the darkness, and hear the ceaseless roar of the torrent. All other sounds were hushed now. Except themselves, there were no other living creatures in the 'Northern Wheal' mine.

Their candles had long ago burnt out, and the darkness was such as might be felt.

They all drew near together, where they could feel each other, and hear each other's breathing. Scarcely a word was spoken, except when one or other would repeat a verse or utter a short prayer, and then a loud 'Amen!' would burst from all.

Once, as the hours sped on and they were getting very low indeed, Ben began to sing 'Rock of Ages.' They all joined in, and felt renewed hope.

'Hark! what's that?' exclaimed Sam.

They all listened eagerly, and there certainly was a great difference in the sound of the torrent. It did not rush and rebound, and splash and swell. It seemed rather to flow in a smooth, rapid torrent, sweeping past in an even flood.

'I should say they had bored the mine,' said Sam sagely, 'and that they was drawing the water off.'

All listened breathlessly; the rush grew less and less, till it fell away to a stream, and at last stopped altogether.

'I think we might venture to get out now,' said Sam, who had taken the initiative, and he stretched out his long limbs and went slowly down.

The other men followed his example, and they helped Ben, with a kind of rough tenderness, shaking his hand warmly when they were all on the ground, and saying he had been the means of saving their lives.

Sam strode on slowly in the dark, for the navigation was very difficult. Everything in the mine seemed to have changed its position,—barrows, and blocks, and pieces of timber were lying about everywhere.

Once his foot struck against something soft and cold. He stooped down and felt a poor human body that had been shipwrecked in the flood. So he lifted it reverently aside, and told his companions to be careful how they trod just there.

As the little party drew near where they supposed the ladders to be, they saw lights approaching, and heard voices calling.

'Here we be, sure enough,' shouted Sam. 'Hallo, here, this way, this way!'

The lights accordingly turned towards them, and their eyes were all gladdened by the sight of Captain West, Thomas Penhurst, and about a dozen other men, with candles in their hands and in their hats.

'Here are some of them, thank God!' said Captain West, stepping forward. 'Here are Sam Tregarth and Ben, Harry Smith and Steeve Hodson. Where are the rest of you, eh?'

But there was no answer: the rest of the fifteen men had perished in the flood.

'Well, we must be thankful some are spared,' said Captain West gravely. 'I hardly thought there was any chance. To tell the real truth, I'd given you all up. How did you manage to escape?'

'We may thank this boy for it all,' exclaimed Harry Smith.

'If he hadn't a' found a ledge of rock for us to get on, we should never have been here to tell the tale,' added Hodson.

'Give our blessed Lord His due,' said Sam solemnly. 'We were very near death.'

Captain West shook hands heartily with Ben, who, half-fainting as he was, felt his face flush with pleasure at the captain's kindness.

Thomas Penhurst stepped forward and shook hands with him also. Then he drew a flask out of his pocket. 'You had better all take a pull at this, my men, and perhaps it will give you strength to go "to grass." You are all tired enough, I daresay.'

That they were; their pale, haggard faces and trembling limbs gave sufficient evidence of that. But for the brandy, they would hardly have had strength to get up the ladders.

Captain West and Thomas Penhurst watched them up out of sight, and then went on their dreary search for the bodies of the unfortunate men who had been drowned.

Dan Polryn was found lying, a ghastly heap, near the very spot where his reckless pickaxe had brought destruction on so many. He had become entangled among the heaped-up barrows in the narrow tunnel, and remained there, having perished among his coveted treasures.

CHAPTER XII.

BEN AT WORK.

THE dim grey morning was beginning to dawn when Agnes heard voices coming nearer and nearer. She heard the tramp of many feet outside, and grew cold as she thought of what they might be bringing.

Annie heard the voices also, and rushed to the door. It opened, and she fell, with a cry of joy, into her husband's arms.

'Ah, old wumman,' exclaimed Sam, returning her embrace, 'thee thought I was drowned, didn't 'ee? The Lord be praised, we are come home safe! Here's Ben too,' cried he, drawing forward a very pale, shivering boy, whose face was streaked with mud and sleet drops.

Harry Smith and Steeve Hodson had followed also, as well as two or three other men, who were anxious to hear all the tidings they could.

'We are just tired out,' said Sam; and Annie let go her hold of her boy, and prepared to attend to her husband's wants.

'We will go now,' said Harry Smith. 'Good-bye, Ben. But for that lad, Mrs. Tregarth, we should

have been like the rest of them, stark and cold at the bottom of the mine.'

There was a good fire burning, hot blankets ready, the kettle boiling, and everything prepared that could minister to the needs of Sam and poor Ben; so Miss West said, as they were in good hands now, she would leave them and go home.

'But it is still dark,' urged Annie, 'and the morning is so cold and wet. Do wait a little longer, miss.'

'No, thank you, Annie; I must go home and watch for my father now. He will be up soon, I hope. Ben ought to get to bed as soon as possible,' said she, looking at the half-bewildered boy, who was sitting with his head drooping and his whole body shaking. 'It has been too much for him, I think.'

It had indeed been 'too much' for the poor boy, whose frame had not yet developed into the hardy nature of the long-tried miners.

He was put to bed, with his limbs shivering and his faculties half stupefied, and the next day he started from his restless slumbers in a burning fever, his eyes expressionless, and his mind wandering. All the horrors of the inundation seemed to haunt him over and over again, and he tossed restlessly on his pillow, while he called out 'the water was coming, and they should all be swept away.'

The doctor gave him soothing draughts, and at last he become more composed; but a long and weary illness followed, and for a time he hung between life and death.

Poor Annie watched him night and day, and was rewarded by seeing a gradual recovery set in, and health beginning to return to him again.

One day he was lifted out of bed and allowed to sit for awhile at the cottage door. Very frail and weak he seemed, but that would soon mend now, they hoped.

The cold winter was over when Ben took his first view of the outer world, and the spring flowers had begun to peep out of their sheltered retreats and light up the little garden with their pale hues.

Ben felt a rush of thankfulness flood his heart as he looked out, and he exclaimed—

'Oh, mother, how glad I am to get well, just when the sun is coming out warm and bright like this! I shall soon be able to go down the mine again. Father must want me; he's all alone now.'

'You are not to go down yet for a month or more, Ben,—the doctor said so. And as for your father wanting help, why, he can get on nicely without you, for Steeve Hodson has joined his "pare" now, and he's a capital help to him,—good honest fellow as he is! No, Ben, you must not trouble your head about the mine yet.'

Ben found he could not trouble his head much about anything just then; the very exertion of gazing out on the moor and hearing the great hammer, with its monotonous crash, crash, tired him.

He could do nothing but sit and think,—too weak to read or to talk much yet. He could hardly lift himself from his chair without help, or walk across the room alone, so how could he get strength to attempt the ladders? The very thought made him shudder. But this incapacity was only caused by his weakness, he knew well; when the time came for him to work, he would be ready, and willing also.

While Ben sat day after day at the door, he often thought of what had happened in his illness. He could not remember all, but still he was conscious that everybody had been wonderfully kind to him.

Harry Smith's wife had come to see him often, and had brought him the finest eggs her hens laid. She had also given him a large jar of quince jelly, that she had sent to her sister for, who was a servant at a farm in Devonshire. Mrs. Smith had given him these things, and with tears in her eyes had called him her husband's preserver.

Steve Hodson, who had no wife, had come himself, and brought him a fine long-eared rabbit to add to his store; every now and then he also brought a lobster, a fresh whiting, a pot of clouted cream,—anything he thought might tempt the slowly-recovering boy to eat.

'You must not die, my man,' he would say in a husky voice. 'You saved us, and we can't spare you.'

These were trifles, perhaps; but Ben thought of them all now, as he sat at the door and watched the sunshine. Harry was playing at his side, with the once coveted boat in his possession. It was all broken and soiled now, for he had none of little Josh's careful habits.

Agnes West came to see Ben often, and there was no one whose visits he liked so much. Her kind voice and sympathetic manner had a great charm for him. She would repeat hymns, and often brought him picture-books that delighted his heart.

Some time after, when Ben had made a great advance in strength, and when he had begun to work in his garden, sowing seeds, and making a general

preparation for summer, he heard a voice calling him over the railing one afternoon. Looking up, he saw Thomas Penhurst standing there.

'How are you this afternoon, Ben? Have you any desire for another peep at my microscope, and another feast of honey? If so, come with me, for I am just going home to tea.'

The garden tools were quickly put away, and Ben, with his best clothes on, was soon, bright and smiling, by Mr. Penhurst's side.

They walked on, taking the direction, not the shortest way to St. Low's, but past the new house spoken of before. Here Mr. Penhurst paused, smiled at Ben, and then walked up the garden path.

Ben looked at him with surprise. 'Are you going to your Utopia, sir?'

'It is not "Utopia" now, Ben; *that* was a foolish word for me to use perhaps. I ought to have known you could not understand it. However, I may explain now that it means imaginary—chimerical; and as this house is my own, the word ceases to be applicable.'

Ben looked at the windows with neat green venetian blinds, at the fresh-painted railings, and at the prettily laid-out garden, with delight. He had never seen any place he admired so much.

Inside the wonders increased. Every room was nicely furnished—all plain and useful—wanting, certainly, the refining touch of a woman's hand, and the ornamenting taste of a woman's mind, but still perfect in their kind, and most convenient.

The parlour had a green carpet, green covered chairs and sofa, and white muslin blinds. Pots of

hyacinths were already in full bloom in the window, and bright tulips were there also. A pretty book-case, full of books, filled one corner of the room, and the microscope and box of slides stood in another.

'Are you going to live here always, sir?' asked Ben, when he had collected his ideas a little.

'Yes, Ben, I hope so. How do you like it?'

'Oh! it's beautiful. I never saw such nice rooms.'

Mr. Penhurst laughed at his raptures, and said 'he hoped everybody would be of his opinion.'

Then they went into a smaller room, where the tea was laid out on a table near the fire. After that the microscope was brought out, and the new slides examined; but Mr. Penhurst did not seem to take as much interest in explaining them as usual, and Ben's eyes and thoughts were wandering also. The new house had taken him so much by surprise, that he could not settle his ideas.

'I think we'll give it up, Ben, for this evening,' said Mr. Penhurst, rising up, with a smile. 'When I return home again, you must come and have another look at the microscope.'

'Are you going away, sir?'

'Only for a fortnight,' replied Mr. Penhurst quickly, and rising to look out of the window. 'I shall soon be back, and then you may have a longer peep at the new slides.'

Ben told his mother, as soon as he got home, 'Mr. Penhurst was going away,' and wondered where he could be going.

'I'll be bound he's going to get married!' exclaimed she, with a sudden thought. 'I heard it was to take place this spring.'

'Who is he going to marry?' asked Ben, with surprise.

'Why, Miss West, to be sure. Who else is good enough for him? Ain't you pleased, Ben?'

Pleased! That was no word for Ben's delight. The two people, of all he had ever seen, that he admired most—and both of them were so kind to him—were really to be married.

Thus our tale winds up with a happy wedding after all; for it could not but be *happy*, when two so agreed in heart and thoughts were united. In due time Agnes came home to her pretty new house, and began her new life hopefully and contented, praying to do her duty to her husband, and, above all, to her God. Her lot was not one of rank or fashion, but it was rich and beautiful to her, for it was crowned with love.

Before long the owners of the mine recognised and rewarded Thomas Penhurst's merit in a marked way. Old Captain Hills retired from his post as underground captain of the mine, and Thomas was appointed to fill the vacancy; so he had more than ever opportunities of doing good among the men.

Sam Tregarth's 'pitch' continued to turn out well. His accounts on settling-day now were worth looking at; and he was laying by a sum that would be a comfortable provision for old age.

One great improvement Mr. Penhurst caused to be made directly he became captain. He had a winze sunk in the middle of Sam's 'pitch,' so that the air could find its way down there more freely, and Sam and his son were no longer half stifled with the horrid 'cold-damp.'

Ben recovered his strength after awhile, and became as active and zealous as ever. The first time Mr. Penhurst paid a visit to Sam's 'pitch' after his marriage, he found Ben at his post, hammering away with all his might.

There are many dangers and hardships in Ben's daily life, but he never dreams of complaining or of repining at his hard lot. He works eight hours in the twenty-four, in a heat that equals the noonday; but he wipes his heated brow and goes on again without flinching. He sits in darkness, away from the glad sunshine, and out of sight of the green fields; but he loves to think of the bright world above, and of the still brighter world that is prepared for him when his life's work is over. Ben's voice is often heard down in the depths, as he carols out some joyful hymn, that springs from his very heart; and God, 'who giveth songs in the night,' hears him as well as if he sang from the mountain tops. So we must not despise him in his lowly lot,—in fact, we might take many and many a lesson from him. Brave, self-sacrificing, persevering, and courageous, he does many a deed, not known indeed to fame, but registered on high, and for which he will one day hear the rapturous 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter *thou* into the joy of thy Lord!'

We will take our leave of him now; and when we grow weary or dissatisfied with our lot, let us think of Ben Tregarth down in the depths of the Cornish mines, and perhaps we shall learn to be content with what the good God has given us.

Life in Neutral Tints;

OR,

MARGARET VERNON.

MARGARET VERNON.

CHAPTER I.

SHRUBLANDS AND SUNNYMOUNT.

MARGARET VERNON was hard at work in the garden one fine evening in June. She pulled up weeds, watered the beds, and then paused to examine the result of her labour. But that piece of ground, like many other things that occupy the attention without giving due recompense, was evidently proving a complete failure. The earth was of a curious black colour, as though smoke, soot-rubbish, and coal-dust had been mingled up together in the soil, and had produced a singularly hard and sticky composition. The few leaves that had ventured to peep up through the ground were of a sickly yellow colour, that might by and by turn green,—at least Margaret hoped so,—but their present aspect was not promising. Some plants that ought to have been in full bloom at this season still held their flower-buds tightly folded up in their calyx, and nodded with a kind of rigid defiance on their stalks.

'They want more sun, poor things!' said Margaret to herself as she looked up and down the beds; 'but then we never do get much sunshine here,' added she, with a sigh.

Seldom were truer words spoken. At the present moment thick smoke was pouring out of half-a-dozen tall chimneys, and as there was not a breath of wind stirring to clear it away, the dense mass brooded in the atmosphere like a heavy cloud. At that moment the garden gate opened, and Harry Vernon, a slight, delicate-looking lad about nineteen years old, came quickly up the pathway. He gave a glance at his sister's work, and a slight smile of amusement, mingled with a little contempt, passed over his face.

'I wonder you take such trouble with the garden, Maggie; it will never repay you.'

'I don't know that, Harry; some of these roses are in bud already.'

'In bud! I've just come from Sunnymount, and *there* the roses are in full bloom, and a splendid display they make.'

'I suppose so; but then Sunnymount is worthy of its name. Everything flourishes on a hill-side that has a southern slope. But look at my geraniums, Harry: they are sending out some fresh leaves already.'

'I wish you could see the geraniums at Sunnymount: the Tom Thumbs and Frogmore scarlets are one glow of colour, and the Mrs. Pollocks are like a lot of rising suns.'

Maggie laughed a light musical laugh, and then said, 'It won't do, Harry; you shan't put me out of

conceit with the Shrubland parterres, because Sunnymount's are brighter. I shan't throw my garden tools aside and sit down in despair because other people's gardens are finer than ours. One must do one's very best for one's own. But what took you to Sunnymount this evening?'

'Mr. Sam Bridges wanted me to take some papers to the office for him, so I went there for them, and had to wait a long time while he was getting them ready.'

'Who did you see there?'

'In the first place, Mrs. Bridges, who had on a pale yellow silk dress, with no end of black lace on it; also Lucy and Carrie Bridges, who wore white dresses with blue bows here and there. I like white and blue —don't you, Maggie?'

'Very much; but I had no idea you could describe ladies' dresses so accurately. Had they a party, then?'

'Yes; but not a tea-gathering like Blacknorth people delight in. They were expecting dinner guests —indeed several came in while I was waiting.'

'You must have felt sadly *de trop*, Harry?'

'Nothing of the sort. They all wanted me to stay, and I should have done so had I been in proper trim. Mrs. Bridges, in particular, was most gracious to me. Such are the honours I gain by being clerk to the house of Bridges! By the by, Maggie, the ladies are going to call on mother soon; now don't you raise any objections if any little civilities arise in consequence.'

'Of course I shall not object; why should I, Harry?'

'Oh! I know you are rather peculiar in your ideas, and are not in general favourably impressed with the aristocracy of wealthy people.'

'Not when wealth and vulgarity go together, as is too often the case in this part of the world; but I never heard the Bridges were vulgar, remember. They seem pleasant sort of people. I only wonder they never called on us before.'

'Yes, it was strange,' replied he thoughtfully, while his sister began taking off her garden gloves, and preparing to go in-doors.

'Come in now, Harry; tea is ready, and you must be half famished. But here are the boys,' added she, as three lads of various sizes came trooping in.

'We've had such a capital game of cricket!' exclaimed Arthur, as they all ran up laughing and talking. 'We were out on the common, and beat the Hodge boys all to atoms—such splendid play! such fun!'

'Now hurry in to tea, all of you. What smutty hands and faces you all have! You are the worst of all, Willy!'

'I couldn't help that,' grumbled the boy; 'the whole common is sowed with coal-dust. You would be just as bad, Maggie, if you had to run and pick up the ball, as I've been doing.'

'I daresay I should. Well, never mind now; a little soap and clean water will soon set all that right again. But don't forget to get all the black off before you appear in the dining-room.'

Off they ran, and Harry walked beside his sister as they went round the path and up the steps into the hall. Dr. Vernon's house was a large, very old-

fashioned building. Once, perhaps, it had been a fashionable residence, and its gardens might have been pretty in those days; but the vegetation had dwindled down to the lowest ebb of scantiness. The trees were gaunt, wretched specimens, and the plants such as Margaret had just been tending. The cause of this degeneration was very evident, the neighbourhood had become celebrated for its wealth of coal-mines, and it bore the usual griminess that accompanies such wealth. 'Shrublands,' as the house was called, no doubt stood quite alone at one time, in its own stately retirement; no doubt it was then some distance from the town: but now the dense mass of population had encroached on it on every side. Long, straggling rows of houses were built up to its very gates; it had become the very centre of unhealthy-looking streets and crowded alleys. Closer and closer they had grown, till from the very windows of Shrublands House the squalid, toiling men and women might be seen going and returning from their work, and the quiet of the place was disturbed by hoarse voices, noisy shouting, and children's clamour. There is no sound more beautiful than the merry sounds of children's laughter when it chimes in with rural echoes. When warbling birds, rustling trees, bubbling brooks, lowing cattle, and tinkling sheep-bells swell out the chorus, it is pleasant then, and the heart must he dull indeed that catches not the sweet mingling of a grand harmony. But the effect is different when the children's voices come to you from the dirty streets, when they shout and quarrel in the gutters, and make the summer's evening hideous by their cries and shrieks. Yet these were the sounds that invaded

Shrublands day after day, till the inmates had grown used to them, and indeed scarcely noticed them now.

'He who sits from day to day
Where the prisoned lark is hung,
Heedless of its loudest lay,
Hardly knows what he has sung.

'Where the watchman in his round
Nightly lifts his voice on high,
None, accustomed to the sound,
Wakes the sooner for his cry;'—

sang the poet Cowper eighty years ago, and he expressed much of the world's experience in his song. It is well it should be so. We get used to our daily lot, and we hear the jingling of our various chains, till we grow scarcely to heed them at all.

Dr. Vernon had come to live at Shrublands when he was quite a young man; he had brought his handsome young bride there, and there a numerous race of children had been born to him. Of these, four boys were left, and one daughter, the Margaret Vernon whose toil in the garden we have just been relating. Dr. Vernon was quite aware how the neighbourhood of Shrublands had degenerated, and he would fain have removed his family to a more congenial locality, but he had no choice. In the whole town of Blacknorth there was no other house he could have taken; all were many degrees smaller and worse than his own. The few ironmasters who lived there, and who drew their wealth from the mines, had built for themselves houses as far as possible from the neighbourhood of the shafts and chimneys. Had Dr. Vernon been a rich man, doubtless he would have built himself a new residence also; but he was

not rich by any means. His practice lay among the inhabitants of the mining districts, and no large fees ever came to reward his zeal. In fact his gains scarcely served to keep poverty from his door. What the struggles had been to educate and bring up his large family, none but his wife and 'He who sees all things' alone knew. Yet he never wearied of his work. Unselfish, refined, and 'God-fearing,' he was content to labour among the poor, often without any chance of recompense. In cases of accident from fire-damp or flood in the mines, he had been up night after night watching the cases, and attending the poor fellows as carefully as though they had been nobles in the land; dressing their wounds, bathing their brows, and telling them of God's mercy in the midst of their sufferings. Many a deathbed had been soothed by him, and many a man with parched lips and blackened face had lifted his voice with the doctor's, and joined with him in words of prayer. So the name of Vernon was well known in that part of the country, and beloved, as well as known, among the miners. The Vernons had never visited much among the wealthy ironmasters of the land. Two or three reasons had hitherto prevented it: they were poor, refined, and not inclined to do homage to ostentation or pretence. At Blacknorth most of the wealthiest people had risen from the ranks, and, having little or no education, had tried to establish their importance by show and grandeur. But the Vernons had declined to accept invitations to their entertainments,—they could not tolerate *that* kind of visiting,—they would not do homage to the golden splendour; and the great people had looked down on

them and scorned them accordingly. But now the children were growing up, Mrs. Vernon thought it time to abate their rules of reserve and self-dependence. She lamented their want of society, and would fain have found them some acquaintances of their own age and standing.

A short time before our story opens, Mr. Bridges, a very wealthy ironmaster in the neighbourhood, advertised for a confidential clerk. Harry Vernon applied for the vacancy, and had at once been accepted. This had led to some slight civilities between the houses, and the Vernons agreed, in family council, that if the Bridges made any overtures of friendship, their overtures should not be nipped in the bud.

Sunnymount, the home of the Bridges family, was a very different place to Shrublands, and Harry had been quite within bounds in his description of it. A lovely spot it was, to all intents and purposes. Built on the incline of a hill, whose summit intervened between it and the mining neighbourhood, it might be said to have turned its back on the source that supplied its wealth. No trace of the chimneys, the machinery, or the shafts of the mines could be seen from any of the Sunnymount plate-glass windows. Before the house was a velvet lawn that sloped down to a narrow river, in which the cattle from the neighbouring flat pasture-land came and drank in the warm summer days. The birds that had been scared from the common by the whirl of machinery, and the increasing riot that reigned there, fled to the shades of Sunnymount, and made the morning musical with their songs. Beyond the valley in which the cattle

'Sunnymount was built on the incline of a hill. Before the house was a velvet lawn that sloped down to a narrow river. A lovely spot it was to all intents and purposes.'—THE MINER'S SON, page 142.

grazed were more of the sloping hills, and woods of various kinds of trees wreathed them up to their very crests, forming a pleasant background to the rather confined landscape. The house itself was large and handsome, built of stone, and rather florid in its ornamentation. Inside was a lofty hall, a grand staircase, and many large rooms handsomely furnished. Mr. Bridges 'had spared no expense about the place,' he was wont to say, and it amply repaid him by being bright and pleasant. The gardens were well kept and flourishing, the shrubberies ample and luxurious, and the large conservatory well stocked with rare flowers.

No wonder Harry Vernon's head was filled with admiration of the place and its various beauties, and no wonder he was anxious to share in the hospitality of the house of Bridges.

CHAPTER II.

ON WESTON COMMON.

MARGARET VERNON'S occupation for the day was by no means over. She took off her dark dress,—for experience had taught her there was utter ruin in gardening in anything decent,—then, having put on a pretty light muslin, and tied some pink ribbon in her hair, she descended to the dining-room. The boys were already there, wishing for their tea,—all but Harry, who was gazing out of the window at the scanty garden and crowded street, and comparing the scene in his own mind with the luxuriant beauties of Sunnymount.

'Had we better wait tea for father?' asked Margaret of Mrs. Vernon, who had just come into the room.

'I think not, Maggie; he has not had his dinner yet, you know;' and she glanced at the end of the table, where a half-used joint of cold meat and a knife and fork were laid.

'How late father is! Do you know where he is gone to-day?'

'He went over to Weston Common to see the

poor fellows who were hurt in Mr. Kingston's mine last week.'

'That is more than five miles away. Poor father, how tired he will be!'

'Yes, and he had a miserable night's rest too; he was disturbed twice before four o'clock,' replied Mrs. Vernon, with a sigh.

Margaret cut large pieces of bread and butter, filled the cups with not over strong tea, and then called the boys over. They did full justice to the plain fare, and enjoyed it with all the zest a game of cricket gives to the appetite,—all but Harry; he had drawn his chair up beside his mother and sister, and was musing on the various lots that are portioned out to people. That glimpse of luxurious life at Sunnymount had set him thinking. The smell of the flowers, the bright rooms, with their elegant draperies and soft couches, were a great contrast to the grim plainness of his own dining-room. Never had Shrublands seemed so gloomy to him before, and he felt half dissatisfied with it all. Then there was his sister Maggie, with her calm, refined-looking face, her rippling brown hair, her pretty figure, and clever mind, doomed to be for ever feeding and teaching those hungry boys. 'Why, a girl like she was thrown away among them! She ought to adorn such a home as Lucy Bridges had, and right well she would look in it.' Life had strange incongruities in it! and Harry's thoughts grew puzzled as he thought it over. Perhaps he would have given them all the result of his ideas, had not the door opened, and Dr. Vernon come into the room. He was a man about forty-five years of age, tall, and mild-looking, with kind blue eyes,

and hair already rather grey. He looked, as Mrs. Vernon expected, very tired indeed, and sat wearily down on his chair.

'Now, boys, you have finished your tea, run off to the study and get your lessons ready, and I will come and hear you presently,' said Margaret, as she put in fresh tea and rang the bell for the rest of her father's dinner.

'How did you find the unfortunate men?' asked Mrs. Vernon, as soon as the three boys had retreated.

'Two of them are already dead,' replied the doctor, 'and a third cannot linger much longer,—indeed, one could hardly wish it; his eyes are both destroyed, and his other injuries are terrible. Poor fellow! he has only been married a year, and there was his young wife, with her infant, only a month old, half-distracted, as she watched his agonies. I staid with them more than an hour, and my presence seemed to comfort them.'

'Could we send them anything?' asked Mrs. Vernon musingly.

'I should like him to have a little port wine, it would keep up his strength for the time; and some soft linen rags would be an incalculable good just now. But we have no one to send. Perhaps to-morrow there might be a chance, or I will take the things with me when I call on Thursday.'

Harry had started up. 'Let me go, father. I'll set off at once, and be back again before dark.'

All his puzzles about the incongruity of life were over for the present, or if he thought of them, it was only to compare this second picture with the first,

and to check the discontent that had been awakened in his mind.

'But, my dear Harry, Weston Common is such a long way off!' said his mother. 'Can't James go?'

'Oh, I sent James off to the other end of the parish directly I came in!' replied the doctor; 'he won't be back for a couple of hours or more.'

'I'll go,' exclaimed Harry emphatically. 'Now, Maggie, get me the wine and linen, and I'll be off.'

'You had better measure out half a bottle of the best port,' said Mrs. Vernon,—'there is still half a dozen of Mr. Hill's present left, I believe; and the linen is in the top drawer of my wardrobe up-stairs.'

'Stop a minute or two,' called out the doctor suddenly. 'As you *are* going, Harry, Maggie may as well make you up a little parcel for Sanders' wife.'

'What shall I send her, father? What does she most want?'

'What does she *not* want? That would be the easiest question to answer. Jack Sanders has his hands injured in such a way that he will not be able to work for months, and there are his six little children and his sickly wife almost starving.'

'Then I'd better send them some meal and tea,' said Maggie. 'Anything else, mother?'

'Put in a little sugar, dear; and here is sixpence to buy the poor children a loaf of bread.' Margaret hurried off on her numerous errands, and Mrs. Vernon said plaintively, 'I wonder Mr. Kingston does not pay more attention to his people! There seems always something wrong going on among them!'

'Mr. Kingston is in London just now, and his

house is shut up. But what could he do, Jane? Half the troubles the people suffer are brought on by their own carelessness. It was *proved* that one of the men was smoking in the mine, and *that* caused the explosion; he opened his safety-lamp, and positively lit his pipe at the flame. He was killed on the spot; and poor Askew, who was near, saw him and warned him in vain.'

'Askew is the man whose eyes are injured, is he not?'

'Yes; and his life will undoubtedly be sacrificed also!' exclaimed the doctor. And then he went on: 'The people bring their poverty on themselves also; they have no idea of providing for times of trouble. When they receive their wages, they are squandered away, idly, wastefully, at most times. Now I believe Sanders' wife to be a thoroughly indolent woman,—her house is dirty, her children in rags,—and yet one cannot see them starve.'

The doctor carved the cold meat as he was talking, and began to eat his dinner; but his relish for food was gone,—his long fasting and his exertions on Weston Common had effectually taken away his appetite, and he could only force himself to swallow a morsel.

Margaret returned to the dining-room with a small basket neatly packed. 'Here are the things, Harry. What time shall you be back to-night?'

'About eleven o'clock, I expect. I'll say "Good-night" to you, mother, as I hope you will be asleep long before that time. Will you let me in, Maggie?'

'Oh yes, of course I will,' returned she, with a smile. 'It is a terribly long walk for you; but I

believe there is a moon,—at least there ought to be,—only one gets but few glimpses of it here.'

'I shall have good light all the way, what with the long twilight, the moon, and the furnace fires. It's after six o'clock now; I shall reach the common before eight.'

Harry found the first part of his journey anything but lonely, for the people were returning home from their work. When he reached Blacknorth Common, about half a mile from Shrublands, he found the place crowded with a noisy collection of men, women, and children, who were round the various pits'-mouths. Every now and then a dusty, coal-black group would emerge from the shaft, shouting, quarrelling, or laughing, according to the humour they were in. Light words and profane oaths were circulated among them as they greeted one another. The engine was still pumping away to keep under the water in the mine. Empty corbies and huge piles of coal varied the scene a little; but to an unaccustomed eye the view would have been pronounced singularly gloomy and depressing.

Mr. Wilson, the foreman of that part of the mine, emerged from the shaft just as Harry was passing, and he stopped a minute to exchange a greeting. Wilson's face was a pale blue-black, and his teeth looked brilliantly white, by comparison, when he spoke.

'Noisy lot they are, sir!' exclaimed he, looking after the ragged-looking groups. 'One 'ud think hard work would keep down their spirits a little; but no, as often as not I've to call them to order down there.'

'I'm going to Weston Common to see Askew,' said Harry, looking down at his basket.

'Ah! I see, sir. Poor Askew won't do no more good, I hear. They're a sad, careless lot in Kingston's mines; but what can be expected when the master's always away? Mr. Kingston made his fortune in them very mines, sir; and now I hear he's got a grand house in London, and hardly ever comes near the place. I don't know what all the people would do, but for your father, sir; he does more good than half the masters put together.'

'I must go now,' said Harry, 'or I shall be late.'

'Our Jack is going to your house this evening, sir. He found some more of them things Miss Margaret wanted to see—Stephen-teris, or something or other, he called it.'

'Oh, you mean *Sphenopteris dilata*, Mr. Wilson!' said Harry, laughing. 'I suppose your son has found some more specimens of the "old world" ferns, that grew and flourished long before man was created?'

'Now you are laughing at me, Mr. Harry.'

'Indeed I'm not. Why, nearly all the coal you dig up, day after day, is formed of decayed ferns and other plants and things. Three hundred kinds have been discovered. You know nothing is ever wasted; and our coal-fires are made up now of the vegetation of other days. But good evening; if I stay here talking of the flora of the past, I shall never reach Weston Common. I only wish some of the luxurious vegetation had remained here in our days, for it looks terribly blank and bare now;' and, changing the basket to his other arm, he set out on his journey with renewed speed.

'Harry took the crying infant and soothed it, while Mrs. Askew boiled up some of the arrowroot he had brought.'—THE MINER'S SON, page 151.

In poor Askew's cottage one would hardly have recognised the rather fastidious Harry Vernon. He understood the necessities of the case at once, and helped Mrs. Askew to change the bandage on her husband's poor scorched eyes. He showed her how to dress the wounds; for the loving wife was faint-hearted and timid, and shrunk trembling when she touched his scorched flesh. Then Harry took the crying infant and soothed it, while Mrs. Askew boiled up some of the arrowroot he had brought, and mixed port wine with it. Altogether he came as a spirit of comfort, and Mrs. Askew thanked him with a gush of tears.

Poor Askew pressed his hand at parting, and said in a broken voice, 'God will bless you for this kindness, young sir. You are your father's true son, sir; and the time will come when you will be rewarded. The good Lord will say to you, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." If ever trouble comes to you, sir, may kind hands soothe your pain, and may Christ Himself strengthen you!'

The words came out slowly, and the voice was trembling, as the almost dying man uttered them, but they had a strange effect on Harry. As he came out into the air, there was a mist before his eyes that prevented his seeing for the moment. 'Surely that poor fellow's words have not affected me to tears!' mused he, as he dashed away a very visible moisture; 'but they seemed to take such strong hold on me, as if a voice from the grave was speaking. I shall *never* forget them,—I know I shall not,' continued he. 'A time of trouble may come to me—when, or how, or

where, I know not at present; but should it come, even if the "kind hands" are not near to soothe me, I trust "Christ Himself" will not forsake me.'

Poor Harry! his feeling was prophetic, though he did not know it then.

It was a fine warm evening when he began to retrace his steps homeward. The moon, that Maggie complained was seldom seen at Shrublands, was visible enough on the common, and it shone over a scene of unromantic desolation. In the neighbourhood of the coal mines there was still abundant activity. The engine was working away, letting off its steam with a fierce, continuous hiss; chains were still rattling, wheels were turning, and the heavy corbies were still being brought to the pit's-mouth with their loads of shining black coals, or heavy iron ore, and tumbling out their heaps to increase the enormous piles. The night was not a season of repose at Blacknorth—far from it! A body of workers took the places of those that had been toiling by day, and were then delving away many hundred feet under the ground. As far as the eye could see, glowing fiery furnaces sent out their flames and sparks, lighting up the country with a strange, unearthly glare; chimneys of all sizes and shapes poured out their sulphurous smoke. Some of the structures had galleries, through which the flame played sportively; and these, Harry knew, were the blast furnaces. The large brick boilers, sending forth their puffs of steam, and the great iron pipes that crossed from them, he knew were generating the blast, feeding the furnaces day and night with fire that never died out. They had been roaring on as long as he

could remember, and would probably roar on for years to come. Down went the barrow-loads of fuel into the burning pit, while the flames darted up with renewed vigour, and lapped out to meet their food. Here and there the flood of melted metal was running out in a red-hot stream into coal-black moulds prepared for it on the ground.

Harry Vernon was so accustomed to these blast furnaces, and to seeing them cast forth their glowing liquid iron, that he hardly thought of the weird appearance they bore. He never dreamt of conjuring up to himself poetic visions of witches mixing their compounds over glowing fires, and revelling at their nightly pastime, for he knew well enough the scorching fires were only the caldrons of honest iron-workers, who were making pig iron, rails, and bars.

Well might the Blacknorth furnaces roar, and the flames leap up,—thousands of tons of coals went to feed them! It was well the iron ore and the fuel to melt it were found in the same mines.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE STUDY.

THE three boys were all gathered round the library table when their sister went in to fulfil her promise to them; piles of books and exercises were before them, and they had evidently been making good use of their time. The Vernon boys might all be trusted; they had too much right principle in their natures ever to shirk their work when out of sight of the elders; so Maggie found them all ready, and she helped them through their work with right good-will. Through the Latin derivations, through the fractions, through their problems in Euclid, it did not seem to matter to her,—she led them on, and listened to them without the slightest difficulty, and with a genuine girlish prettiness, that threw a charm over the rather abstruse teaching.

Years ago she had petitioned to learn the same lessons Harry did, and they had for a long time kept on at the same pace; but they had from circumstances branched off in different directions, and by degrees had discovered their natural tastes, and followed them. This early training had not been lost

on Margaret. It had served her by enabling her to help the three younger boys with their lessons, and it had repaid her by seeing them carry off the best prizes year after year at Mr. North's school.

Just as they had finished, a knock was heard at the door, and the servant came in, bearing a tray with some 'queer-looking things Jack Wilson had brought,' she said.

'These are the curious fossils and specimens he promised to get for me,' said Margaret; 'and now lessons are over, we will have a look at them.'

'How plainly the fronds of fern can be traced!' said Arthur. 'I wonder if any other plants can be found!'

'Yes, many others; but ferns are by far the most plentiful. They must have covered the earth with a wonderfully thick vegetation to produce such quantities of coal.'

'I wonder the animals didn't eat them all up!' suggested Willy.

'I suppose animals did not like dining off ferns in those days any more than they do now,' replied his sister. 'I have read, though, that no herb-eating animals are supposed to have lived in those remote ages. Pine-trees and other conifers must have been plentiful in those days, for their remains can be traced in all the coal measures.'

'What! did those large trees really turn to coal?'

'They really did, Willy; and by all accounts they must have been perfect monsters—very giants among trees.'

'How wonderful! I should like to know how the change crept on.'

'They must have been stored up for ages, and no doubt the change was very gradual. They changed to peat first perhaps, then to fossil coal, and then to the black, bituminous article, with its oils and gases.'

'But I want to know how all the ferns and pine-trees got buried deep down in the earth,' said Willy.

'We can only suppose some great convulsion must have taken place on the earth ages and ages before man was created. Some terrible commotion must have hurled the mighty forests down, and over them strata above strata have been piled. Our mines tunnel into these vast storehouses, and thus the present inhabitants of the world are supplied with coal.'

'How surprised people must have been when they first found it out!' exclaimed Arthur.

'Our old friends the Romans are said to have known of the coal in Britain; but during the Saxon period the use of it seems to have been neglected. No doubt wood was plentiful in those days, and they did not care to dig for it.'

'I suppose coal always lies deep?'

'Yes, Arthur; it goes down very near the ribs and skeleton of the globe. There is first the silurian system, then the old red sandstone, and then the carboniferous or coal measures. It does not of course lie in level thicknesses,—in some seams it is many yards thick, in others much less. You must not fancy these strata lie in smooth layers, like a heap of pancakes; for though their relative position is always the same, still they bear traces of great commotions among them. There have been upheavals that have made great disturbances. In some places the coal is heaped up, again, near the surface.'

'Do tell us more about the plants,' said Willy, who thought the subject was getting rather beyond him.

'I will tell you of a whole race of plants that are found in the coals, but not anywhere else on the face of the globe; they seem to have vanished out of vegetation altogether.'

'Do tell us about them, Maggie!' exclaimed a chorus of boys; and she went on:

'They are called *Sigillaria*, and no less than twenty-two sorts have been discovered in our British coal-fields. They must have flourished plentifully in those ancient days, for whole seams of coal are said to be composed of their remains alone. These plants had beautiful stems, with ornamentation like exquisite carving on them. Some were fluted, some had round knobs and rings, and others had crescent-shaped figures on them. Even the very roots of these plants had the same kinds of curious carving on the outside. What the flowers and leaves were, is more than I can tell; for, alas! no specimen has yet been traced.'

'Coal is very useful,' said Edward, a grave little boy, who had been listening eagerly for some time, without saying a word.

'Very useful indeed!' replied Arthur, laughing. 'That is a highly original remark of yours, Master Ned.'

'Perhaps you can tell me some of its uses, Edward?' said his sister.

'It makes good fires in winter, and boils our food,' replied he, after a pause.

'Except when it roasts it,' put in Arthur. 'Well, coal is all very well with regard to its uses, or, if looked at in a poetical kind of way; and somehow,

Maggie, you always look at things in that way. By some subtle alchemy you have the art of extracting poetry out of everything.'

'Have I, Arthur? It does not seem a difficult process, after all, if one only looks close enough and deep enough. You know people extract the most beautiful and delicate colours out of the most unpromising substances;' and she asked reflectively, 'What would life be without its poetry, music, and painting?'

'Why do you class such different arts together, Maggie? They are not one bit alike.'

'But I think they *are* alike, Arthur. They all spring from one set of feelings, carried out in various ways. There must be an innate love of the good and beautiful to produce the grandest effects in either of those arts. All true poetry must come from the heart, which gives forth its ideas in words and rhythm. True music must wake in the heart also. The ideas in that case come forth in sound—holy, rapturous melody!—such as Handel's thrilling oratorios. Do you think his harmonies could cause such a thrill through the countless thousands that listen to them, had it not been that *his* heart was ever speaking to *their* hearts? Painting would never give pleasure either, unless the heart directed the imagination; it would dwindle down to a mere mechanical colouring or copying: genius gives it expression and language. But we have wandered away from our subject. What were we talking about last?'

'Oh, Master Ned was enlightening our dark minds about the uses of coal, and he had just proclaimed it was good for boiling kettles. I must say we test *all* its qualities in this region of mines. We not only

see it *ad nauseam*, but we hear it perpetually, as its jetty avalanches flow from the corbies to the coal heaps. We breathe it also, in fine particles that mingle in the air; and we taste it, smell it, and eat it, in its refined, dusty state.'

'How silly you are, Arthur!' replied Edward, half offended, as he thought his brother was only laughing at him.

'Have I not said the truth, and nothing but the truth?' exclaimed Arthur. 'You cannot deny one word of my assertion, unfortunately!'

'Now, Edward, tell me some of the other uses of coal. What lights up our streets at night?'

'Gas, Maggie. But is gas made from coal?'

'Yes, it is produced by a distillation of coal. One ton of the Newcastle coal will yield ten thousand cubic feet of gas; and even then, will leave thirteen hundredweight of useful coke behind. Do you know what coke is?'

'It's something like coal, but not quite, because it is lighter, and rings like metal.'

'Coke is very useful also. It is constantly employed in the smelting furnaces, for it gives forth great heat, and no smoke. When properly prepared, it is also used to make the fires in the railway engines: all the fires in our locomotives are fed with it. What would London be without its gas and its railway traffic?'

'I suppose it would go back to the use of oil lamps and stage-coaches,' suggested Arthur. 'We have certainly made a step or two in advance since the dark ages, when the night-watchman used to enliven the dim streets by calling out, "Half-past one o'clock,

and a stormy morning!" and when the highway robbers used to meet the coaches and confront the passengers with, "Your money or your life!"'

'Yes, indeed!' replied Maggie, laughing; 'and we don't wish those times back again. I was going to tell you something about coal-tar, which is a very valuable material, unpromising as it smells and looks. It is made use of for many purposes, and we will have a chat about it some other evening perhaps; but it is getting late now. Come, boys, it is time to prepare for bed.'

'Will coals ever be all burnt up, Maggie?' asked Edward, with a grave face, and the other boys laughed heartily at his question.

'Many wiser heads than Edward's have considered that very subject,' replied his sister, 'and some people say we are rather extravagant in the way we dispose of our coals. For instance, we send every year more than seven million tons away to foreign countries, free of duty; still, even with our present consumption and exportation, it has been computed that our coal measures will yield enough coals to last us a thousand years more; so with this glimpse into the future, I must adjourn the meeting. Gather up all your books and slates, boys!'

When the boys were gone, Maggie went to the drawing-room, and began playing the piano in the fast-gathering twilight. Her mother hearing the sounds, came into the room to listen, with a warm shawl thrown over her shoulders. Even in that mild June weather Mrs. Vernon felt cold and shivery.

'Where is father?' asked Margaret, turning round.

'He was called out again,' replied Mrs. Vernon,

with a sigh, as she seated herself in an arm-chair near the piano. 'He had just fallen into a doze after dinner, and was getting a nice rest, when Will Hammond came to say his wife was taken ill; so he had to go off at once, and there's no knowing when he will be back again. He was dreadfully tired! A doctor's life in the mining district is anything but a sinecure. Hard work, little rest, and less pay, has ever been your father's portion here! and I'm only thankful he has had strength to bear it all. He never complains, that's one good thing. I'm sure the Lord has fitted the back to the burden in his case.'

'He always does, mother,' said Margaret softly.

'And now, Maggie, play me something, for I feel dreadfully out of tune this evening.'

'What shall I play for you, mother? What would you like?'

'I should like one of Beethoven's sonatas; but that would necessitate the gas being lighted, for you could not see your notes. No, no, don't ring the bell; I would rather sit in the twilight. Just play anything you like, from memory.'

Margaret Vernon was not a brilliant performer, or yet a showy one; but her music was such as could be felt,—it was just the strain to set one thinking and dreaming. It was rippling, liquid, and touching; one could better listen to it, and enjoy its influence, than explain it. Doubtless, as she said herself to Arthur, it was 'the heart giving forth its ideas.' She struck a few chords, deep and solemn as church music, and then went on with the soft, eloquent reveries she knew her mother most liked.

Perhaps they set Mrs. Vernon musing, for she

remained a long time wrapped up in her shawl, and almost motionless in her chair. Life had become a very prosaic experience to her of late years. In her early days she had been a great belle and beauty, and had received the usual homage given to such attractions. But when Ralph Vernon came in the way, with his earnest ways and his tender pleading, she gave up all her brighter prospects, and consented to share his fortunes. She had gone through many anxieties and untold worries in her rather trying experience of life in the mining country of Blacknorth, but she had never once regretted her choice, or wished herself back in the gay world again.

But the long years spent among the dust and smoke had begun to tell on her. She had grown pale and delicate of late, and she often caught herself longing wearily for a peep at clearer skies, and a breath of purer air. One would hardly have recognised the once handsome, dashing Jane Murdoc in the faded, thoughtful-looking Mrs. Vernon. Time does make a difference in people, but more than time had changed her. Long communion with a man of Dr. Vernon's religious, unselfish character had produced its due effect; and though her beauty had faded, her heart had gained a better nature, her thoughts a higher tone.

By and by Margaret sung an evening chorale, and then closed the piano.

'Come, mother mine,' said she, kissing Mrs. Vernon caressingly, 'it is time for you to go to bed, and I will sit up for the truants. It must be after ten o'clock now. How long these June evenings are!'

CHAPTER IV.

THE MORNING VISIT.

THE Bridges did not seem to be in any hurry about calling at Shrublands, and Harry fidgeted about it day after day. When he returned from his office, and inquired, 'Has anybody called to-day?' Margaret always knew who he meant.

'These great people take a long time making up their minds,' said she laughingly one evening. 'It requires some consideration before Sunnymount holds out the right hand of friendship to Shrublands. However, we must try to exist on in obscurity.'

They were both in the garden at this time. Harry was playing with his glove, and Maggie was tying some pale, wretched-looking carnations to a stick, and stooping over the dingy beds.

Presently she heard a cheery voice saying, 'I've brought you the key of my desk, Vernon; so you can get the bills out yourself in the morning. I shall not be there till late.'

Margaret would sooner not have looked up, but she could not lean over the borders for ever; so she was obliged to lift her head, and thus encountered a

pair of keen dark eyes watching her, just over the garden wall. All three stood silent for a minute, and then Harry recollected himself.

'My sister Maggie—I mean Miss Margaret Vernon —Mr. Sam Bridges.'

Mr. Bridges lifted his hat, with a pleasant smile. 'I must apologise for intruding; but I saw Harry's head over the wall, and I thought he was alone.'

'I have been gardening a little,' said Margaret, remembering her large apron and soiled gloves.

'I fear you have an unpromising soil, Miss Vernon,' said Mr. Sam, glancing up and down the beds. 'I wonder how some of the American plants would answer there. Of course they would require a proper compost prepared for them; but rhododendrons, kalmias, and andromedas might flourish for a season. They are hardy enough, I should think.'

'The smoke is very trying,' said Margaret mildly. She was still painfully conscious that there might be smuts and streaks of black on her face, and she was very desirous Mr. Bridges should turn round his horse and ride on his way as quickly as possible.

He did not seem of the same opinion, for he still lingered, thinking how fair a picture the young lady was making, with the dusky foliage for a background. Her dark, shadowy eyes, flushed cheeks, and clustering brown hair recalled something to him that he could only half remember. He had heard of Miss Vernon, of course, and had often seen her casually in church, or in the streets in passing, but he had never been brought face to face with her before, and he did not seem in a hurry to close the interview.

'My mother and sisters hope to call on you soon,

rejoined he presently. 'They would have been to visit you before this, but we have had a house full of visitors.'

Margaret bowed, and said her mother would be glad to see them, and then drew off her gloves with such a resolute sign of going in-doors, that Mr. Sam took the hint, lifted his hat, and rode off.

'Isn't Mr. Sam Bridges a nice fellow?' asked Harry, as he looked approvingly at the retreating figure of the tall, stalwart young man. 'He's not a bit stuck-up and proud.'

'Why should he be proud or "stuck-up," as you call it?'

'Oh! because he is so rich—I mean his father is. People say old Mr. Bridges has made an immense fortune in his mines.'

'That's no reason why Mr. Sam Bridges shall be proud,' replied Margaret quickly. 'If he was bumptious and pompous on the strength of his father's riches, it would prove he has very little sense.' She was still rather vexed at having been caught unexpectedly, and ready to vent her anger on the unfortunate Mr. Sam.

'I'm going down in the mine with him to-morrow.'

'What for? I thought your duty was above-ground.'

'So it is; but I shall have to go down with Mr. Sam now and then, and I shan't mind that a bit. Maggie, don't you think they will soon call now?'

'How can I possibly tell, Harry? I shall be very glad when their visit is over, for I dislike stiff morning calls particularly.'

'Oh, you won't find the Bridges ceremonious people

at all. Carrie, the youngest, is the brightest, liveliest little creature you ever saw—very pretty and "piquant." You will be sure to like her.'

Margaret soon had an opportunity of forming an opinion on this subject, for the very next day a stylish carriage drove up to the gates of Shrublands, and three ladies were seen making their way up the garden paths.

'It's Mrs. Bridges and her daughters from Sunnymount,' proclaimed the servant in a loud whisper, as she ran into the dining-room to announce the important event. A kind of mysterious awe seemed to steal over the simple Blacknorth girl at the advent of these important personages. 'Quite the great people of the place! Why, old Mr. Bridges employs more than a thousand men, and the Blacknorth mine is nearly two miles in extent underground!'

Poor Sarah Evans had been impressed with the greatness of these people from her earliest days, as her father, uncles, and brothers were all miners and colliers on their grounds.

Mrs. Bridges was a good-looking, motherly woman, with a kind face and quiet manner; she looked like one who might be happy anywhere, if she was only allowed to be in peace. Her husband had worked his way up from a very different position to the one he now occupied. He had been a shrewd business man in his day, and a large fortune had rewarded his efforts. Mr. and Mrs. Bridges were plainly educated people. Their lives had been too arduous and too earnest to leave much time for the cultivation of accomplishments, even had they possessed any, which might be a doubtful point. But they had been deter-

mined to make up for their want by sparing no expense on the education of their daughters. The best boarding schools, the highest masters, had been found out, and hundreds of pounds had been spent on them.

The result was that the thing had been overdone. The Miss Bridges had become accomplished, elegant young ladies—only rather too much so. They had grown to despise the very source of their wealth. Anything connected with the mining districts was hateful, they thought. People, place, and ways and customs were all classed in the same category—all were hideous to them, and they pined for a life in London. Maggie found this out before she had been five minutes in their presence.

'Papa has half promised to take a place for us near town,' said Lucy with animation. 'And we are *so* anxious he should carry out his plans. We hope we shall not be much longer in this horrid place.'

'Yes, we hope to spend the next season in town,' added Carrie, her handsome face lighted up with animation. 'I long so much for the excitement, the gaiety, and the society we are sure of there. Are you fond of London, Miss Vernon?'

'I have never been there,' said Maggie, laughing. 'I suppose one's liking to the "big town" would depend on the life one might lead there; for I believe there are greater contrasts in London than in any other place—I mean greater extremes of wealth and misery.'

'I'm sure there is misery enough in this place!' exclaimed Lucy, lifting her hands to express horror. 'Did you ever see such wretched objects as one meets with in these streets? Their dirt and squalor is something marvellous! The women and children seem to

eschew the use of soap and water altogether. I detest coming in contact with any of them!'

'Don't you think that is a pity?' asked the mild voice of Mrs. Vernon. 'Ladies can do a great deal towards improving the poor creatures. Advice goes a good way, and so does example. I don't think one ought to shrink from doing what one can among them.'

'That's just what Sam says,' returned Lucy with warmth. 'If we listened to him, we should go and visit them,—go in and out of their horrid dens, and listen to their complaints. Why, the hideous sights and dreadful smells one would be sure to meet with there, would kill me in a month! and I could never understand their barbarous jargon!'

'It would not do for your ideas to be universal,' replied Mrs. Vernon. 'Visiting among the colliers' wives requires a great amount of resolution and great self-discipline; but the poor creatures are very grateful, and much good is done by it.'

'So my brother says,' returned Lucy good-humouredly. 'He often dins in our ears about duty and lofty principles, and all that sort of thing; but I tell him I'll give any amount of money he thinks I can afford out of my allowance, even to the extent of denying myself a new dress now and then, to pay any one to go among them; but as to visiting them ourselves, why, Carrie and I could not bear it—could we, Carrie?'

'I should not like it. Did you ever visit among them, Miss Vernon?'

Maggie smiled, and her mother added quickly, 'My daughter has a district, and is therefore often among the poor creatures.'

Both young ladies turned to Margaret with some curiosity. 'Do you really visit them? You must have courage!'

'I like it,' replied Margaret quietly. 'They are so pleased with a little sympathy and kindness, and I never find them the least disrespectful or rude.'

'Well, I really think one must have a special mission for such a thing. I confess I have not the least taste or desire for it. Used you to visit the colliers' cottages when you were young, mamma?'

'I confess I did not,' replied Mrs. Bridges, with a slight blush and some confusion. Perhaps she remembered her early youth was very different from the 'pleasant lines' that had fallen to her daughters. 'I confess I did not, Lucy. Things were very different in those days. The colliers and their families were looked on as hopelessly ignorant, and ladies did not think it their duty to help them and teach them, as they do now. Your brother is quite right in his ideas, though; and when he takes the whole management of the mines into his own hands, I am sure he will make many improvements.'

'I shall be glad when that day comes,' rejoined Carrie brightly; 'for that would be the signal for our leaving this detestable place altogether.'

The rest of the conversation was about the gaieties and excitements of London. Its concerts, amusements, and beauties were talked over with much animation, till Mrs. Bridges rose up to take leave. 'I hope you will come and see us soon, Mrs. Vernon. It is *our* loss that we have not often met before, but I hope we shall frequently see each other now.

Don't trouble to pay us a stiff morning call, for Sunnymount is a long journey off, I know; but I hope you will all come and take a bit of dinner with us soon;' and she laid her husband's and son's cards on the table.

Sarah Evans held the door open for the ladies, and made a deep curtsey as they passed. Never had she been so near the great people before, and she looked after Mrs. Bridges' lavender silk dress with intense admiration.

'It had three little flounces, and each one trimmed with black lace,' said she, when describing it to her mother the next day; 'and the young ladies had on pale blue silks, white bonnets, and blue feathers,—they did look lovely, sure.'

'How do you like them, mother?' asked Maggie, when the last sounds of the carriage wheels had died away.

'They appear good-natured people, Maggie; but it is very sad to see their utter indifference to the poor people entrusted to their care. How can one blame the unfortunate creatures for their ignorance and dirt, when even their employers look down on them with contempt and abhorrence?'

'Their brother seems to take a fairer view of the case, though. He appears to have much clearer ideas of his responsibilities,' said Maggie.

'Yes; and I am sure it will be a good thing for the Blacknorth mines when they come entirely into his care. The Bridges only carry out the usual habits of the ironmasters and their families. I have seen it in a dozen cases. They make their fortunes here, and then despise the place. The end generally

is, that they go away to live, and benefit other regions with their wealth.'

'I wonder Sunnymount does not content the Miss Bridges,' observed Margaret, with a half sigh, as she looked out on the dingy garden of Shrublands and the crowded street beyond. They might be so happy in that lovely home, and lead such a calm, peaceful life there, if they had quiet country tastes and simple habits. I wish *we* had such a place; I am sure we should be quite contented. But I believe we are all looking forward to something beyond our grasp.'

'This world is not our rest,' said Mrs. Vernon, rising to go out of the room. 'I suppose we cannot help looking forward sometimes; but contentment is a great good, Maggie, and learning to do our duty another great good. The reward will come when we are admitted to that blessed rest that remaineth for the people of God.'

Margaret thought a good deal about the Bridges as she sat at work that day. It had been a peep into their history that had surprised her and set her musing. What their lives might have been had they carried them out properly, and what their lives were, such as they made them, seemed two such different pictures! Great advantages and opportunities for usefulness were within their grasp, and yet they could not value them. They were ready to throw them all aside for a term of feverish excitement in London. With work around them and about them, their hands were idle, and they could find nothing to do. They might be classed among those who 'hear indeed, but understand not,' who 'see indeed, but perceive not.'

CHAPTER V.

A WALK UNDERGROUND.

HARRY Vernon had been very differently employed on that bright July morning, for Mr. Sam Bridges and he had spent the greater part of it nearly a quarter of a mile down in the depths of the earth. They had a hasty luncheon of biscuits and sherry in the office, and then they rigged themselves in a complete miner's suit. Each was provided with a safety-lamp, for open lights were strictly forbidden in the mine.

'If the men would only be careful and attend to rules,' said Mr. Bridges, as he looked at his lamp, 'we should not have half the explosions one hears of. Why, I've known some of the miners actually smoke tobacco-pipes down there, though they knew they might send themselves and numbers of others into eternity by doing so. Their blind recklessness is something to marvel at. Now, Vernon, are you ready? Here comes the cage.'

They were now on the coal-black platform at the top of the shaft, and the cage or skip came up with a clatter and a clash. The engine-house, with its ever-moving wheel, was about fifty yards off, and there were chains and pulleys extending from it to the shaft,

and by this means the cage was raised or lowered into the mine as required. It came up now with its lower compartment loaded with corbies filled with coal, and on the upper flat were some workmen returning to daylight again. Empty corbies were put in place of the filled ones, and then Mr. Sam and Harry took up their position on the upper part of the cage.

'This is easy travelling,' said the former, laughing. 'When my father first came to these mines, the men used to descend by a rope. Every miner had to make a spring at it, and hold fast. Then they were dropped down one after another by some kind of rough machinery. They must have looked like a lot of buckets going down a well. Even girls used to descend in that way, for they employed women in this mine then.'

'It must have been very dangerous work.'

'You may well say that. Had they missed the rope, they must have gone down head-foremost, and have been dashed to atoms. This is not a very dry shaft. You don't mind a little summer rain, I suppose?'

Drops were falling pretty rapidly round them, but their miners' suits were well fitted to resist the moisture.

'Have you ever been down in a mine before?' asked Mr. Bridges presently.

'Never. This is quite a new scene to me.'

'Then I hope you like it, Vernon,' said his companion, as the cage stopped with a loud bump.

Harry felt half-bewildered at first. The noise of trucks, shouts of men, strokes of hammers, the booms of blasting, and a hundred other noises, seemed all mingled up together. The lamps the men carried

cast their faint glimmers here and there, but the general aspect of the place was dark and grim. The roofs were low and rugged, and Harry gave his head one or two thumps, till experience taught him wisdom.

Through the very narrow tunnels, men, stripped to the waist, dragged the corbies with their loads of coal along. It did not look very easy work, as the poor fellows, in a cramped position, pushed one at either end of the corby. The roof was low, and, had they ventured to stand upright and stretch themselves, a severe collision with the jetty ceiling would have been the result.

'That is hard work,' said Harry, as he watched them pass slowly along, their faces and necks streaming with perspiration.

'Yes, it tries their energies pretty severely. But that method of transit is only used for short distances, and in the low parts of the mine. Here is a specimen of the working in the chief thoroughfares;' and he pointed to a long train of trucks that were coming on a tramway, drawn by a solemn-looking horse. 'Take care, Vernon. This place is very narrow.'

Harry, in his haste, plunged backwards into a deep pond of inky water, from which he emerged just as rapidly, with a splash and a scramble.

Mr. Bridges could not help laughing at his discomfiture. 'We have not very even pathways here, Harry. Our mine has not been macadamized yet. Never mind, you'll get used to it all in time. Come with me now in this direction, for I want to show you the stables.'

'Poor creatures!' exclaimed Harry, as he watched half a dozen horses eating away in their subterranean

mangers. The place was very dark, but the stables were kept dry; and as for heat, there was no need to complain of the want of that.

'You need not pity the horses. I assure you they are well used to their lot, and lead an easy enough life down here. They are never over-worked, and the men are kind to them. Many of their brethren above-ground might envy them.'

'Do you think they get used to the dim light?'

'Yes, so much so, that when they are taken up to the sunshine they seem quite distressed. Their eyes are hardly able to bear it. Habit becomes second nature with them. There are various halting-places all through the mine, where hay is kept to feed them on their journeys.'

Mr. Bridges had a word or two for most of the men he met. All seemed to know the 'master' as he passed on, inquiring, directing, and advising. Some were shovelling the loose coal, which lay about in gigantic heaps; others were boring holes for blasting. They stood for a minute to watch this process. The man bored a small hole in the soft coal, put a cartridge inside it, placed some damp coal-dust on the top, and then applied a lighted match.

'Come on quickly, Harry!'

They were scarcely out of the range when a sound like a distant gun was heard; and when they returned to watch the effect, a large heap of loosened coal was strewed about.

'That was soon done!' exclaimed Harry, looking with admiration at the large quantity the man had to shovel up.

'Yes, it pays well. The men get so much for

every score of tubs they fill. They make enough to keep themselves and their families comfortably. Their own improvidence, and too often their wives' mismanagement, causes the poverty one sees about.'

Exploring the dim mine required the utmost caution, and poor Harry was constantly coming to grief as he followed his friend. Sometimes he tumbled over the rough iron sleepers; then he made a dart to save himself, and struck his head against the angles in the ceiling, or bruised his shins against the projections in the grimy walls. He felt a kind of envious admiration of Mr. Bridges, who steered his way with the utmost ease, bowing dexterously when required, and keeping clear of all rugged hindrances.

On they went, for miles, Harry thought, sometimes stopping to rest in the cabins that were in some places hewn out of the coal, with seats of the same material, to invite their weary limbs. Lamps were here and there suspended on the walls, which threw their dim rays a short way, and made the distant darkness more dense. They had passed through many swing-doors on their way, which had invariably opened and closed with a marvellous celerity that had rather puzzled Harry.

'These doors are most important,' said Mr. Bridges, 'and safety in the mine depends greatly on them. They serve to ventilate the place at a distance from the shafts; and leaving open one of these doors at improper times might fill the place with gas, and cause no end of destruction.'

'Are they worked by machinery?'

'I will show you the machinery when we come to the next door. You see, we prop up our ceilings

with poles of strong wood. They are necessarily very strong, for they have a good weight to support. There are no end of corridors, arches, and vaults here. Aladdin's halls could never have been more varied and extensive.'

'But you want the diamonds and precious stones to light them up, and illuminate the place a little.'

'What are diamonds but pure, crystallized carbon? They are very near kin to our coals, by partaking some of their nature. Of the *two*, I consider the black diamonds, that lie there in heaps, infinitely more valuable. Your well-cut, sparkling gems may serve to light up the clustering locks of some high-born dame. They may glitter on her neck, and flash the tints of the rainbow from her rings; but the lowly coal, the diamond's sister in nature, lights up a thousand happy firesides, and gives comfort and heat to half the people on the globe. You see I have grown poetical on the subject.'

'And coals are very valuable too!'

'That they are, Vernon; you may well say that. But here is another door, we will now hunt for the working machinery.'

Just beside the door a tall collier was standing, leaning against the wall, with a shovel in his hand. He was speaking in a loud tone of voice, and with many vile oaths, to some invisible person.

'That is Will Brown,' said Mr. Bridges, listening for a minute; 'he's one of the worst fellows in the mine, and should have been discharged long ago. I verily believe I smell tobacco, and smoking is strictly forbidden here.'

'Hollo, Brown, what's the matter?' said Mr.

Bridges, going straight up to him; 'have you been smoking?'

'Oh no, sur;' and he put his hand quickly to his pocket, and began shovelling at a heap of coals with all his might.

'I certainly smell tobacco.'

'I left my pipe home, sur, so it ain't me.'

'I hope not; smoking is against the rules, and so is swearing, as you know well. I wonder you are not ashamed to use such language! Remember you are not out of God's sight, though you are down in the dark mine. Who were you swearing at?'

'My youngster, Jack, sur; he went right off to sleep, and I were a-scolding him fur it.'

'Jack, come here!' called out Mr. Bridges; and a little fellow, black as ink from coal-dust, damp, and tears, emerged from a blank space cut in the coal, and just behind the door.

'I weren't asleep, sur, sure I weren't,' said the lad, sobbing.

'I hope you were not, Jack, for it would be a serious thing if the door was not opened and shut at the proper time. You must not slumber at your post, remember; so keep your eyes open, and be ready when the corbies arrive.'

'His is a dreary occupation,' said Mr. Bridges, as they walked away; 'but there seems no help for it. The door is swung open by ropes, and must be closed instantly. I make it a rule that the youngsters shall be relieved often, and set to more active work for part of the day.'

'I know those Browns,' said Harry a short time after. 'They are always miserably poor, and give

no end of trouble. Sarah Brown, the wife, has long been Maggie's pet anxiety.'

'She has a large family, I believe?'

'Yes; and they used to be always in the gutter, fighting, squabbling, and shouting, while Sarah stood looking on with her dirty knitting in her hand, and gossiping with her neighbours. However, Maggie took her in hand, and got her to send her children to school, and to mend their clothes.'

'You are speaking of your sister, Miss Vernon, I suppose? Does she visit among the poor?'

'Oh yes! she has a district; and a very lively one, I should say, by all accounts. The domestic virtues are not much cultivated at Blacknorth.'

'I'm afraid not. It often grieves me to see the state of the cottages and children,—dirt and neglect everywhere,—while the men's wages would keep the houses in comfort if the money was wisely used.'

'Maggie has only a very few to assist her,' said Harry.

'All honour to them!' rejoined Mr. Bridges thoughtfully. 'How I wish some people I know would follow their example! But here is a shaft; we will mount to daylight by this one, and not retrace our steps again.'

They waited till the usual number of corbies with coal were arranged on the lower tier of the cage, and then, taking their places on the top one, they were drawn up by the pulleys, and made their appearance in due time on the platform, looking particularly smutty, and half-blinded with the sudden blaze of noonday light.

CHAPTER VI.

WILL BROWN'S HOME.

THE promised invitation to Sunnymount very soon arrived. It was for a family dinner-party, and about half a dozen more guests were included.

'How I wish we could get off from going!' said Mrs. Vernon disconsolately. 'We have been out of the visiting world so long, that it seems hardly worth while beginning again.'

'But I really think we *ought* to accept this invitation, if only for Harry's sake. He has in some degree joined allegiance with the house of Bridges, and we ought to give him our countenance; in other words, I'm sure he will be dreadfully disappointed if we don't go.'

'There's the trouble about dress, Maggie! What can I wear?'

'Your black silk would do very nicely, with your handsome lace collar and cuffs; and you've plenty of pretty ornaments, mother.'

'What could *you* put on, Maggie? I should not like you to look shabby.'

'Nor will I, mother,' replied she, laughing.

'You can't get up a single reasonable excuse. I mean to make up the pretty white muslin dress you gave me some time ago.'

'Ah! poor Walter brought me that home from Calcutta the very last voyage he made, and just a year before he died. Yes, that sprigged muslin will look very well. I'm glad I never had it made up for myself, now. I mean to lend you the pretty amethyst necklace and bracelet he gave me also.'

'How good of you, mother!' said Margaret, going over and softly kissing her. 'I have a peculiar liking for the amethyst; I think I prefer it to all other stones.'

'It is very pretty, and also very becoming.'

'I did not mean that,' rejoined Margaret. 'I was thinking of the beautiful associations of the stone. That lovely oriental gem seems to have peculiar honour,—the very rainbow "refines itself" into its pure violet hue. And then,' continued she more reverently, 'the amethyst was the highest and topmost foundation-stone of the walls of the "holy city," the "new Jerusalem." Oh, I regard it as a beautiful symbol, a gem rich with sacred associations!'

Mrs. Vernon looked at her daughter's bright young face thoughtfully, and mentally contrasted her ideas of precious stones to what her own had been when her brother brought her the beautiful set of jewels from abroad. She had thought only of the display, and she had been excessively proud of the admiration they had brought her at the fashionable parties she then enjoyed so much.

But Maggie *was* different to most people. She had very little vanity, and she thought very little about

her looks. The voice of flattery had never yet whispered to her how very fair and attractive she really was.

There was no society at Blacknorth. An occasional passing visit from an old friend, and an invitation now and then to the vicar's, were the only glimpses of variety she ever had. But she had plenty of visiting of another sort, that gave her views of a very different kind of life; and some claims of that nature brought the discussion about precious stones to a sudden close.

'I nearly forgot I had promised to call at Mrs. Pierce's at eleven o'clock this morning. I must set off at once, or I shall be late,' said Maggie.

'What work have you in hand now?'

'We are to visit in the district this morning; but I shall be back in time for dinner.'

'I wish I was strong enough to go about with you, Maggie.'

'I wish you were, mother, with all my heart; but we must not repine at your delicacy. You went while you had strength for the work; and you must stay at home and take care of yourself now.'

When Margaret arrived at Mrs. Pierce's shop, she found no one there but her husband, who told her that his wife had been taken suddenly ill.

'She's very sorry indeed she can't go with you, Miss Vernon, because there's some bad cases she wanted to tell you about.'

Margaret expressed her regret at the worthy woman's illness, and asked the particulars of the cases.

Mr. Pierce didn't exactly know, but Sarah Brown's eldest boy, Jack, had had his leg broken; and he

also mentioned several other casualties, only too common among the colliers and their families.

Margaret was therefore forced to set out alone on her mission, and she made her way through places that would have puzzled a stranger;—down long, low, narrow streets, with tottering-looking walls, and smutty clothes drying out of the windows. Grimy children were playing in the gutter, and sitting on the door-steps. Their faces had the usual coal-black hue of the district, and their voices a piercing shrillness, as they quarrelled and shouted to one another.

There was just a moment's pause as Margaret with her quick step passed by; and the idle-looking mothers stared after, and talked about her to one another. A lazy, gossiping lot of women they were, who spent their time in an aimless kind of manner, their own negligent habits forming a barrier to all hope of improvement.

Margaret Vernon passed on with a rapid pace to the narrow court that was her own special charge in the district.

Here she knew all the women and their families. She could call them by name, and she was acquainted with the little histories of their daily lives.

'Here's Miss Vernon a-coming, mother,' shouted one of the little Browns, running in-doors to proclaim the news.

Margaret went in also, and Mrs. Brown drew her arms out of the wash-tub, and wiped a chair for her.

It was a trying time at the Browns' just then, and the poor woman was in a peculiarly gloomy frame of mind.

She had a regular 'handful' with the day's washing. Poor Jack lay ill and suffering in the upper room; the baby in the cradle was lifting up its voice in a low, hopeless sort of whine; and three other very little children were in various positions on the rather wet floor.

Mrs. Brown was unfortunately married to a very bad husband,—an idle, reckless fellow, who did no good to himself or anybody else, and whom Mr. Sam Bridges had called one of the 'worst characters in the mine.'

Sarah had been idle herself in former days, but since the district ladies had taken up her case, her habits and manners had much improved. Two of her boys had been sent to school, and those who were too young to go, were kept as much as possible out of the gutter.

Margaret had taken much trouble with her, and had persuaded her to leave off many of her evil ways.

'But where's the use of my trying, miss?' said she disconsolately; 'everything goes wrong, and do look dark. I haven't one bit of encouragement in trying.'

'You mustn't say that, Sarah. However hard things may be at present, they may improve soon. You must hold out bravely, and God will give you strength equal to your day, if you ask Him prayerfully. He always does, you know.'

'It's weary waiting, miss, and troubles only increase. There's my boy Jack, who was a help, poor fellow! why, he was brought home last night with his leg broken, and his foot all smashed, down in the mine. The doctor says he won't do another day's work this six months.'

'I am very sorry to hear it, Sarah. Has he much pain?'

'Dreadful, miss; his cries were pitiful last night, though he tried to keep them in as much as he could.'

'Poor boy! May I go up to him presently?'

'He'll be main glad to see you, miss.'

'How does your husband get on now?'

Sarah wiped her eyes, and answered, with a great sob, 'Worse than ever. He earns more than thirty shillings a-week, but he doesn't bring home more than a quarter of it, and I've all the poor children's mouths to fill. It's terrible how he wastes his money at the public-houses! Oh, I wish Mr. Bridges would pay like Mr. Kingston used to pay his men.'

'How did he manage, Sarah?' added Maggie.

'He paid them all by the truck system. The men didn't draw their wages, but took them out in goods, bread and meat, or whatever was wanted. They got it all from shops, and then everybody got their share, and the poor children had both food and clothes.'

'I daresay that was a good plan, when the men were inclined to be spendthrifts; but I should hardly think sober men or good housewives would like it.'

'I only wish it was *our* case though, miss. It would save us from our misery.'

'So it would, Sarah,' replied Maggie thoughtfully, as she decided in her own mind it would be a capital restraint on such bad characters as Will Brown, if money was never allowed to fall into their hands.

'Such selfish, unfeeling creatures are not fit to provide for their families,' mused she; 'they think only of their own selfish gratification, and their vile

indulgences. If I was an ironmaster, I would never give them the power.'

She had got on a difficult subject now,—one that has puzzled wise legislators, and is still puzzling them,—'the wholesome curb that could be put on the "Will Browns" of the world.'

'May I go up and see poor Jack?'

'Oh yes, miss;' and the woman's arms were instantly wiped, and she led the way up a narrow pair of stairs into the back bedroom.

A miserable, rickety place it was. The old wooden bedsteads and the tottering chest of drawers looked as if they were falling apart by degrees. Thin, poor bedding; but, fortunately, warmer was not required in the hot, sunny weather; and in winter the boys crept close together, and managed to keep themselves from freezing in that manner.

But everything about the room was clean. Sarah had put up a fresh curtain to the window, and poor Jack's head was resting on a neat white pillow.

A sheet was drawn tightly across him, and he looked so still and stiff, stretched out with his leg in splints, that Maggie involuntarily drew back with a shudder.

'He do look dreadful pale and ill, don't he, miss?'

And Jack, hearing their voices, languidly opened his eyes. He had lost much blood in the late accident, and it seemed as though it might be a struggle whether strength and vigour would ever animate his poor frame again.

His voice only came forth in whispers; but he lifted his blue eyes gratefully to the young lady,—her low voice and kind words were soothing to him.

'Think of what I have said, my poor boy, and be patient. God does not afflict willingly; yet it is His will you should be confined here for the present. When you are a little stronger, I will bring you some nice books, and I will read to you sometimes.'

Then they stepped gently out of the room, and Margaret gave the poor woman all she could spare out of the district supplies, and also from her own small store of pocket-money.

She left her in a degree comforted, however,—more resigned, and more able to believe there might be a bright 'lining' even to her 'dark cloud.'

Her despair was not so utter and hopeless, and she no longer thought there was no use in *trying* to do well. She would not give way to that cunning device of Satan, and fall back into her old habits, because things were going wrong.

On the contrary, she promised Miss Vernon she would persevere, and pray to God for more strength, leaving the result in His hands, and to His own good time.

When she stepped over Mrs. Brown's threshold, and out in the street again, Margaret found several women watching for her.

'Please, miss, will you step in and see our Lizzie? She's mortal bad to-day.'

In this house a young girl was dying of consumption,—a pretty, intelligent creature, whose cheeks grew more glowing and her eyes brighter as the end drew nearer.

Mrs. Sharp's house had not the pinched, poor look Sarah Brown's had. The furniture was decent and plentiful. There were good Windsor chairs, and a

table covered with a red cloth stood against the wall, on which were ranged work-boxes, showy tea-trays, and a large family Bible. There was a piece of carpet before the shining brass fender, and a general look of care and comfort about the place.

The men of Blacknorth were not *all* like Will Brown, though he was unfortunately the type of a large class. But others of the miners were respectable, God-fearing men, who worked hard themselves, and brought home their wages for the good of their households.

When the wife was of the same turn of mind, —decent, thrifty, and God-fearing also,—the home was a happy and plentiful one, for the wages were sufficiently good to give them all needed comforts, and to leave something to put by also.

The Sharps were both of this class. They had only two daughters,—Lizzie, who was fast leaving them, and a younger one, who was playing with her doll at the bedside.

Lizzie looked forward to Margaret's visits as a great pleasure, and she was grateful for any little attention. A flower, a book, a kind word, made the poor child happy, and gave her something to think about as she lay there.

Margaret drew a chair over, and talked cheerfully to the poor invalid. She was going home calmly: each day was stealing a little of her strength, some of her power, and she noted the symptoms herself without any dread or sorrow, though she knew what the gathering weakness meant.

'I can't walk across the room, or get into bed alone now, miss,' said she, smiling. 'Mother has to lift me

out when she shakes the mattress; but I tell her it won't be for much longer now.'

'You are quite happy, Lizzy?'

'Oh yes, Miss Vernon: shouldn't you be? It will be a grand thing to be in the "new Jerusalem," with its walls of "precious stones," and Christ as the light thereof! I wish mother, and father, and Alice were coming too; and I wish you were coming, Miss Vernon. Don't you wish you were?'

'If the Lord willed it,' replied Maggie, as her eyes filled with sudden tears. 'But perhaps He has more work for me to do here; and if *that* is the case, it would be wrong for me to wish to leave it. Our times are in His hands, Lizzy, and we must wait patiently.'

Promising to send some flowers—the best the dingy Shrublands gardens had in bloom—and also to look for a fresh supply of books, Margaret took her leave, only to be stopped by other claimants.

One had a sick child; another woman's husband was out of work from having injured his eyes. There was a catalogue of wants that would have filled many a page, and have taken much care and money to relieve. Maggie did her best, as far as she could, and returned home tired, and very sad, when she reflected how little lay in her power,—'a drop in an ocean,' she called it. But then the ocean is made up of drops, and God measures them all in the 'hollow of His hand.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE DINNER-PARTY AT SUNNYMOUNT.

A FEW days after this, the Vernons were all gathered in the dining-room, waiting for the cab that was to take them to Sunnymount.

'You do look stunning, Maggie!' pronounced Arthur, after a critical survey of his sister. 'I'm sure the Bridges girls won't look half as nice.'

'Don't you be disrespectful, Arthur,' replied his sister, laughing. 'Harry would not speak of the Miss Bridges in that way.'

But Harry did not hear her. He was busily occupied in a distant window with pulling on a pair of very light kid gloves, and the work required caution. There was a flush on his cheek that showed the occasion was no slight one to him. For the first time in his life he had been promoted to evening dress, and the glossy shine on his new coat showed it had only just left the tailor's hands. Poor Harry was always a bit of a dandy, and very scrupulous about looking spruce and neat. He was particularly anxious about it now, for the summit of his ambition was reached—he was going an invited guest to Sunnymount.

Dr. Vernon glanced at his wife curiously. It was a long time now since he had seen her dressed out for company. Many grey threads were already mingling in her hair, and her cheeks were thin and worn-looking. There was little left of that brilliant beauty that had made her so admired in her youth. Perhaps the doctor's thoughts had gone back to the time when he had won her from all the gay crowd, and brought her off to that land of mines and coal-dust. Their love for each other had stood the test of time nobly. It had borne the wear and tear of life; it had grown unselfish and purified, and was as superior to the flashes of early passion, as the calm, steady light of the planet Venus is to the changing brightness of that wondrous star, Eta Argus, that puzzles wise-headed astronomers so much, by being sometimes of the second magnitude, and then almost vanishing altogether.

The doctor's love was as warm as ever, and his eyes flashed quietly while he said, 'How well you are looking, Jane! I declare you are quite fine to-day!'

'Am I?' returned she, smiling. 'I'm glad of that, for I've grown quite lazy about adorning myself, and I deserve a reward for my exertions. You ought to have had your hair cut, Ralph,' said she, smoothing the locks of his thin, greyish hair. 'What a comfort you are able to go with us! I was afraid even up to the last minute some one would have called you away. There's the cab at the door now,—I hear a knock.'

But it was no cab just then, only Ben Williams come to say 'his wife was took very bad, and would the doctor come to her at once?'

'There's no help for it,' said Dr. Vernon, rising. 'I don't know when I shall get back; but I will go on to Sunnymount as soon as possible.'

This was a general damper. Mrs. Vernon would much rather have stayed at home now, and felt quite vexed about it.

'I can't help it, Jane,—I am only doing my duty. I should never enjoy the fine things at Mr. Bridges' table if I thought poor Mrs. Williams needed me. No! make all apologies for me, and I'll join you if I can.'

He handed the ladies into the cab, and they set out for their two miles' drive, while he changed his evening dress, and prepared to plunge into one of the blackest alleys and closest dens of all that crowded neighbourhood.

Maggie looked very pretty in her delicate Indian muslin. She had made it up herself, simply and becomingly. Her sweet young beauty seemed fresher than ever; and few could see her earnest brown eyes, shaded by their long lashes, her expressive mouth and pearly teeth, without thinking hers was the best and dearest face in the world. The amethysts, in their neat gold setting, lay on the white folds of her dress round her neck, and the bracelet flashed from her rounded arm.

Great regrets were expressed at the absence of Dr. Vernon; and Mr. Bridges was particularly loud in his laments, as he offered Mrs. Vernon his arm to lead her in to dinner.

'These people are always doing the wrong thing, and getting ill at the wrong time!' exclaimed he in his cheerful voice. 'I owe Ben Williams' wife a

grudge, for disturbing our social gathering and depriving us of the doctor's company.'

'It generally happens so,' replied Mrs. Vernon plaintively. 'Whenever we arrange to go anywhere, he is sure to be called off—such is a doctor's life!'

'Yes, my dear madam, he need be one of the most unselfish of men; and, by all accounts, Dr. Vernon is fully qualified to take his place as such.'

About fourteen people gathered round the table, and Margaret found herself seated between Mr. Sam Bridges and Mr. Wilson,—a gentleman who, with his two sisters, was staying in the house. The dinner-table, with its glitter of glass and rich plate, and its centre groups of exquisite flowers, looked very pretty; the soft summer air floated in at the open windows, and the breath of sweet scents stole in pleasantly. The scene was sufficiently novel to Margaret to make her enjoy it, and she would rather have looked on and listened, had Mr. Wilson allowed her. But he kept up a constant conversation that allowed her no resting time,—'foreign travel,' 'London,' 'the mining counties,' all followed each other in rapid succession,—he abounded in topics. His sisters, who had light hair, and wore blue silk dresses and many ornaments, were equally vivacious. The elder of them engaged Mr. Sam Bridges in animated discussion, which lasted for some time. After dinner, the ladies, by mutual consent, left the drawing-room and strolled out into the gardens and grounds; they walked on the terraces, and seated themselves on the garden seats, enjoying the cool breezes that crept up from the valley.

'Shall we go into the greenhouse now,' asked Lucy, 'or wait till the gentlemen join us?'

'I would rather have a glimpse of it now,' replied Maggie, 'while the light is good. I am rather insatiable in my love of flowers.'

'We had better come at once, then,' said Lucy, leading the way; and the Miss Wilsons and Carrie followed, talking and laughing as they came along. The Sunnymount grounds were beautifully laid out; Harry had been correct in his description of them. All that art and expense could do had been done, and the place was bright with luxuriant bloom. One would hardly have imagined the chimneys of Blacknorth were pouring out their dense volumes of smoke only about two miles off,—the leaves were as green and the flowers as gorgeous as they could be. Passing by the beds where roses, verbenas, geraniums, and lobelias were vying with each other in their showy hues, they came to the handsome conservatory, and Lucy threw open the door. The odour of the 'Madagascar chaplet-flower' came floating out, mingled with the fragrant scents of the marsdenias, and the sloping shelves were one mass of varied bloom.

'How beautiful!' said Maggie, pausing. It was a rich treat to her, but the other girls were accustomed to the display, and heeded it but little.

'These "wax flowers" are pretty,' said Lucy, pointing out some umbels of whitish-pink flowers with drooping heads and a shining star in the centre. 'And these "epiphytes" also,' added she, showing some blossoms of rare beauty that hung down from their airy heights, with fantastic-shaped leaves and rich, vivid colouring. Maggie took the greatest interest in all this, and was deeply absorbed with the

explanations good-natured Lucy was giving her, when the gentlemen joined them. The Miss Wilsons instantly surrounded Mr. Sam, and carried him off. Harry joined Carrie Bridges, and Lucy was in some mysterious manner spirited off by Mr. Wilson; so for a minute or two Maggie was left alone in her study of the flowers. Old Mr. Bridges came peeping in at the door and found her there.

'Ha! Miss Vernon, they have all left you, I see!'

'I think I was the delinquent, and lingered here behind the others,' said she, laughing. 'I am very fond of flowers, and the sight of these has been a rich treat to me.'

'Well, I'm glad there are some young ladies left who have a genuine love for the beauties of nature, for their own sake; but in the present day these simple pleasures do not seem sufficient. People live too fast, Miss Vernon; the rage for excitement destroys the quiet taste, and creates artificial wants. My daughters do not care for all this; they have grown tired of it.'

Margaret did not reply, but she thought it strange that any one could grow tired of such beautiful objects.

'Yes, they detest the place,' went on Mr. Bridges musingly, 'and I have consented to indulge them. We are going to leave here shortly.'

'Are you indeed?' said Margaret, surprised.

'Yes; I have bought a place near London, and the title-deeds have just been signed. My family knew it was all settled only this morning. I gave the deeds to my wife as her birthday gift,' said he, smiling.

'They will miss these beautiful gardens so much!' rejoined Margaret.

'I hope not. At any rate, I have done my best to make amends for the loss. The grounds of our new house are very extensive also, and they are nicely laid out; a very little more expense will put them in splendid order. We shall be within a drive of the great city, so we can go there every day if we choose.'

'Shall you be sorry to leave, Mr. Bridges?'

'I shall, and I shall not, Miss Vernon. I have lived here more than forty years now, and I feel a kind of desire to end my days away from the smell of the smoke and the sound of the hammers.'

'But you are not troubled with either at Sunnymount?'

'Not often, thanks to the hill between us and Blacknorth. Still, when the north wind blows, we get a *soupcon* of both. But I believe my chief reason for wishing to leave the mines is that my son may take the working of them into his own hands now. He has many new schemes and plans with regard to them, that I'm sure will work wonderful improvements. I don't mean with regard to profit,—Sam has his own notions about that; he will not be one of those who will "make haste to be rich." I shall leave the business altogether in his charge now, and I have perfect confidence in doing so. But what dry subjects I am taking up your time with!' said he, as they left the conservatory, and walked round the walks by the shrubbery. 'Here comes Sam himself!' he exclaimed, as that gentleman's figure was seen emerging from a side path, 'and alone too, for a wonder! Where is Miss Wilson, Sam?'

'Gone in, father. Carrie and she are gone to get shawls.'

'Then I'll leave this young lady in your charge. I'm going in-doors also.'

Mr. Sam Bridges took the charge with much apparent pleasure, and suggested at once a ramble to the farther end of the garden, where a splendid view was visible.

'There is just a break between the trees there,' said he, 'and we get a glimpse of the whole valley.'

All the party were scattered about in groups now, and the pleasant buzz of conversation was heard on all sides, mingling with other genial sounds,—the joyous singing of birds, as they prepared to think of rest after the long summer day's warmth, and poured out their evening carols; the lowing of sundry sheep and cattle in the pasture-land, for Mr. Bridges indulged in amateur farming on a small scale; and the lazy rustling of leaves, heavy with their own wealth of luxuriance.

Mr. Sam had many pretty glimpses of scenery to point out to Maggie; and then their conversation wandered away from the beauty around them to the smutty streets and dirty homes of the miners of Blacknorth. Maggie was giving an animated account of poor Jack Brown and his miseries.

'Don't you think something might be done to prevent Will Brown from wasting so much of the family money?' said she at last.

'He is one of the worst fellows in the mine,' exclaimed Sam, with indignation, 'and would have been dismissed half a dozen times over, had it not been in consideration of his decent wife and large family. There are too many of his class, I fear.'

'His wife was suggesting what a good thing it

would be if he received his wages on the "truck system."'

'Ha! she wants the old "tommy" plan revived again, does she? The men used to receive their wages in that way, Miss Vernon, but abuses crept in. Shops took advantage of it, and charged higher prices for the provisions, and gave the work-people inferior goods. Wrong people began to reap the profits; and in many cases the wives of the men became improvident, caring for nothing so that they might eat and drink and make no inquiries.'

'But I think in a case like Will Brown's the system would answer.'

'It certainly would; but one cannot make him and such as him exceptions to the general rules. If I had my will, every man in the country of his character should be paid in kind. I would not let one of them handle money till they knew how to manage it rightly.'

Then Mr. Sam began to talk of some proposed improvements among the people, and Maggie listened with animated face, discussing and comprehending the plans with a quick appreciation. Mr. Bridges looked down at her flushed cheeks and bright eyes with admiration. He felt his first impression of her, as he watched her in the garden at Shrublands, was confirmed. Her face was one that would linger in the memory like a pleasant dream. Presently a silvery, tinkling sound was heard coming from the house.

'That is our summons to tea, Miss Vernon. We must retrace our steps now, I suppose.'

Dr. Vernon had just arrived as they returned to the drawing-room, and was shaking hands with those he knew.

His wife found an opportunity to say to him in a low voice, 'Had you any dinner, Ralph?'

'Yes, Jane; I had the cold meat brought up. Don't be uneasy about me; Sarah Evans took good care to supply all my wants.'

Old Mr. Bridges came up to them, and took a chair beside Mrs. Vernon.

'We must get the doctor out of Shrublands before long, Mrs. Vernon. I'm building a nice house on the other side of the hill that you must persuade him to take. I only wish it was on this aspect; but that would be too far from Blacknorth, and out of the parish, you know. Should you like the change?'

'Oh yes, I should like it extremely, if our ways and means would allow. I am sure Shrublands must be unhealthy, for it is in the midst of foul air and hideous noises.'

'Then I must get the doctor to come and look at the new house some day. It will be finished in about four months. I only regret we were not better neighbours when we had the chance. We are only getting acquainted with each other on the eve of a parting.'

'Are you going away, Mr. Bridges?'

'Yes; we leave in a couple of months. I've bought The Beeches, a snug little place near London.'

'But what will the mine do without you?'

'My son takes that in hand, as well as the northern mines. I give them all over to him. He will have enough to do and think about in future, but he has plenty of energy to carry into his work.'

Harry had been enjoying himself amazingly, for Carrie Bridges was amused at his fresh, young idea of things, and devoted much of her time and conver-

sation to him. It was a pleasant pastime to her, and she watched his undisguised admiration, and his attempts at gallantry, with a subdued flash in her merry eye. It was merely an evening's amusement to her; but to the boy it was a new experience, a view of life that would be thought over for many a day to come.

While the Miss Wilsons were crashing out a stormy duet, Lucy Bridges came over and sat beside Maggie.

'I have been thinking so much over our conversation at your house the other day,' said she, 'and Carrie and I have talked about it many times.'

'Have you? We were speaking about the Blacknorth people, I remember.'

'Yes; and Carrie and I both felt it quite a reproach that you should go about among them, and take such trouble, while we have done nothing, positively nothing, to help them. It never struck us as being a duty before our conversation with you that day. We never dreamt about visiting them, or anything of the sort. Had we been staying here longer, we would have joined you; but regrets are vain now, as we are leaving the place altogether. Will you use this trifle among the sick people, in any way you judge best? and I will send the same sum every three months.'

She held out a five-pound note, and Maggie took it, with grateful eyes.

'Oh, Miss Bridges, this will buy so many things! Poor Jack Brown shall have some comforts to strengthen him in his sufferings, and Lizzy Sharp shall have some good wine. *She* is dying of consumption, and grows weaker every day. I know a

dozen people who shall have their sick-beds cheered by your timely present to them, and there will still be plenty of money left. Many hearts can be made glad by your kindness.'

'It is but a little gift after all,' replied Lucy, as her eyes filled with quick tears. 'I understand what my brother meant now when he used to tell us we neglected our opportunities.'

The lingering summer twilight had scarcely died out of the sky when Dr. Vernon's cab was announced; and when they went down on the terrace, they found Mr. Sam Bridges standing there, with a huge bunch of choice flowers in his hands.

'The gardener cut these,' said he, handing them into the cab to Maggie, 'and I don't think he has shown his usual good taste. I'll look out for some finer flowers before long, and send them.'

It had been a pleasant evening after all, and even Mrs. Vernon confessed she had enjoyed herself very much. 'They seem very good-natured people,' said she, 'and I am very sorry we are so soon to lose them.'

'Yes,' rejoined Harry frankly. 'I'm terribly sorry they are going away. It's a great shame! just as we are getting to know them, and I like them *so* much!'

'Our blessings brighten as they take their flight,' quoted the doctor; and then they continued to talk about Sunnymount during the rest of their drive home.

CHAPTER VIII

COMING EVENTS.

THE next morning, as Margaret arranged the flagrant blossoms of her bouquet, she recollected Lizzy Sharp, and determined to save some for her. 'They will be a great treat,' mused she, as she filled a couple of vases. 'I don't believe the poor girl ever saw such rare flowers as these are. The wretched-looking specimens I generally carry her only give a faint idea of the perfect beauty of these. The Shrublands flowers have generally to be well washed before they are presentable.' Maggie always handled flowers lovingly, and when she had finished she paused to look at the unwonted display.

Then she heard the boys their lessons, that last night's visiting had set aside. 'I'm going part of the way with you, Arthur, so tell me when you are ready,' said she brightly; and presently they all three set out together, threading their way down the dingy streets.

Mr. North's school lay in the very heart of Blacknorth. It was a large stone building, and had been erected long before the miserable houses by which it was surrounded. Like Shrublands, it had been

hedged in and encroached on by the necessities of the mining population.

The boys left Maggie when they reached their school, and she went on alone. There was some shopping to be done at Mr. Pierce's, for many of her sick people were to share some of Lucy's bounty that day. She had drawn out a list of the most needy, and also remembered their most pressing wants. As she turned towards her district, known by the figurative name of Myrtle Abbey, she encountered Mr. Sam Bridges striding up from a by-street. He started when he saw her, and stopped instantly. She looked so fresh and pretty in her blue morning dress, and with her fragrant bouquet in her hand, that she 'lightened up the grim street,' Sam thought; but of course that was only his poetical idea of the subject.

'I am taking these flowers to Lizzy Sharp,' said Margaret, by way of explaining her presence there in the early morning. 'The poor girl is dying of consumption, and she prizes flowers so much, that I supply her when I can.'

'Mr. Bridges mentally determined that Miss Vernon should have no difficulty in future in that respect.

'Do you always visit your district alone?' asked he presently.

'Oh no; this is quite the exception. Unfortunately my coadjutor, Mrs. Pierce, is ill, so I am obliged to visit by myself now. But I don't mind it in the least. The poor people are extremely civil and grateful,—I never met with the least opposition or rudeness from them.'

Mr. Bridges had turned with her now, and was

walking beside her down the narrow street, picking his way by the gutter, and steering in and out between the noisy children.

'I've been down at the old market-place this morning,' said he, 'and have decided it would be a capital site for the iron church that is to be brought here. The people will not go to the old church. I suppose the distance is one reason; for Blacknorth has rambled away from the church,—I mean the town has been built in the other direction,—and the miners won't recognise it as being in their parish. I want a church in the very midst of the people, and an active, devoted clergyman there, who will visit among them and try to rouse them from their apathy and indifference.'

'That would be a great boon,' said Margaret, with animation.

'Yes, I trust it would be striking at the root of a great evil. The people want watching and rousing. Things are too dead in this parish, Miss Vernon. I know it, and feel it. Their perishing souls are a reproach to me.'

'An energetic, self-denying clergyman might do much.'

'Yes, he would require to be energetic. We have been too long accustomed to inaction and dulness here,—have looked on it as a thing to be borne with; but the time has come for a change, and if God wills, the change shall be brought about.'

'Won't it cause great expense, Mr. Bridges?'

'I am prepared to meet it, Miss Vernon, and have considered that subject well. A man has no right to draw his bodily food from a place and neglect the

spiritual food of his people. I have a vision of the future of Blacknorth that I hope will be realized one day.'

'Much might be done,' replied Margaret reflectively.

'Yes, very much, Miss Vernon. The field is wide, but the labourers have hitherto been few. Had we all been like *you*, it would have been a different story.'

He spoke sadly, for his mind was glancing at the past, and at the work that might have been done. It was clear that when the management of the mines passed into Mr. Sam Bridges' hands, things would go on very differently. The old-fashioned notions of drowsiness and neglect, both among the mine-managers and, sad to say, among the clergymen of the place, would be rooted out, and a fresh, vigorous course of action set on foot.

The poor miner at his work in the gloomy caverns of the earth requires the light of religion to cheer him more than any one. His life would be utter gloom, could he not look on far into the future, and know there was a chance of one of the 'many mansions' for him. Surrounded with dangers, his case would indeed be a hard one could he not feel a Father's care constantly round and about him. A moment of time might summon him hence. Death in many forms stares the poor fellow in his face. Therefore he need well be 'ready,' when the time comes, to 'prepare to meet his God.'

Margaret found poor Lizzy paler, weaker, and even more resigned than she was when she last saw her. The lamp was flickering more and more brightly before it went out altogether, and her emancipated

soul had its summons to the home where the 'Lamb is the light thereof.'

She was delighted with the flowers, and looked over each waxy blossom with delighted wonder, while she thought that even 'Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.'

'I wonder if there will be flowers in heaven, Miss Vernon!'

'I hope so, Lizzy, but they will be fadeless ones—not like these poor perishing things. We shall have all we need there, and flowers will not be left out if they will add to our happiness in heaven. The "heart of man" cannot "conceive" the things that are prepared for him there; but our *greatest* joy will be our Saviour's presence—we shall see Him face to face; the veil that hides Him from us now will be for ever removed.'

'I am getting very near it now,' said Lizzy, smiling; 'I can almost count the steps—every night brings me "a day's march nearer home."'

Poor Jack Brown was getting on as well as one could expect, from his severe injuries.

'The doctor is afraid he will be lame,' whispered his mother, with a sob, as she told Maggie about him. 'It is not so much the leg being broken as the hurt to the foot—a whole heap of coals fell on the poor lad.'

Jack was delighted to see the young lady, for he had news to tell her.

'They say I shall be lame,' said he in his feeble voice, 'and I'm so glad about it.'

'Glad! why, that would be a great misfortune! I did not expect to find you glad about it.'

'Perhaps I shan't have to go below in the mine

again; and father's so cross to me down there. Oh, it's horrid, Miss Vernon!'

'I'm sure it is a very trying place,' replied Maggie.

'Dreadful! I have to sit for hours and hours in a great hole cut out of the coal wall; it's as black as ink, and as hot and close as can be; and I've nothing to do half my time but sit there and watch for the corbies coming, and then to pull the trap open to let them pass. I'm fit to scream sometimes, I'm so miserable. If I'm lame, perhaps I can't go down any more.'

'You must not repine in that way, Jack. What would your mother do if you could not help her a little? You should wish to get well for her sake.'

'I don't want to be idle, Miss Vernon. I should like to be a gardener, and I could help mother just as well then. Tom Collins works in Mr. Bridges' garden, and has a fine time of it among the flowers. Oh! I do wish I could be like him.'

'You must get well the first thing, Jack, and we'll talk about that some other day. I've brought you some nice arrowroot, and two or three books. Shall I read to you a little? for you must not talk any more now.'

'Do you think he's better, miss?' asked Mrs. Brown as she came out. 'The doctor gives me hopes of his life, but that's all. I am fretting for fear he should never be fit for working in the mine again.'

'There will be other work provided for him, then,' replied Margaret,—'better and pleasanter work, perhaps. Jack is a good boy, but he seems to dislike the mine very much. When he gets better, I will get my father to speak to Mr. Bridges about him. Jack is ambitious to be a gardener.'

'Oh, that would be a fine thing indeed! Jack never took kindly to his underground work—he hated it from the very first.'

At dinner that day Margaret asked her father about Jack. 'Do you think he will ever be strong again?'

'I much doubt it. The injury done to his foot is very great, poor boy! He has many a week of suffering before him still.'

'He dreads going down in the mine again.'

'No wonder, Maggie; it must be a dreary place. And that brute of a father makes it all the worse for him; he does not spare his son a bit.'

'I wish we could get him work above-ground.'

'Have patience. His work is to lie still just now; and some of us find that the hardest of all employment. The boy is far too delicate for underground work, and I will find him something to do about this place rather than let him turn trapper again.'

'Oh! I will tell him that, next time I see him; he will get better in half the time when his mind is at rest. What a hard lot the miner's is!'

'Yes, Maggie, even at the best it must be very trying. When I came here first, women and girls were employed underground.'

'How very dreadful!'

'Very much so, Maggie. The poor creatures carried creels full of coals on their backs, sometimes more than a hundredweight in them; and as the top of the seam was often only a few feet high, they had to go on in a stooping posture, their heads bent, and their backs in the shape of a bow.'

'I wonder they could have stood it! it was enough to kill them!' exclaimed Mrs. Vernon.

'It did kill off a good many of them, and it very soon crushed all youth out of the minds and bodies of the rest; they became haggard, decrepit, and wrinkled while quite girls. I am glad *that* phase of the mining agonies is extinct in our days.'

'It was a disgrace to our legislation, and ought to have been punished severely!' exclaimed Arthur. 'The work is bad enough for men, but for girls it is simply unfit.'

'I believe Mr. Sam Bridges will make great improvements in this place,' said the doctor soon after. 'He is undertaking the work in a very different spirit to the old *régime* of the place. He is actuated by a higher motive than the mere hope of making a fortune, as his father has done. I believe he has the real good of his people at heart,' he added.

'I'm sure a change is much required,' rejoined Mrs. Vernon. 'The vicar is far too old and inactive for an important place like this; his church is empty. But for the exertions of the Dissenters, the district might be said to have been dreadfully neglected.'

'The old sleepy times of Blacknorth are nearly over now,' said Margaret. 'Mr. Sam Bridges told me, only this morning, he had been looking at a site for a new iron church.'

'It is much wanted,' replied the doctor, rising to go out. 'We shall have bright days at Blacknorth yet. But I must run away now. Don't wait tea for me, Jane; I don't expect to be in till very late this evening,—I'm going to Weston Common.'

'How is poor Askew?' asked Maggie.

'He is gone. He lingered on till yesterday, when death put an end to his sufferings.'

CHAPTER IX.

AN EVENING DRIVE.

IF the Bridges had been late in making acquaintance with the Vernons, they seemed determined to make up for it now by paying them every attention in their power; and the dingy home at Shrublands became all the brighter from it.

Mr. Sam Bridges took it in his head that, although flowers would not flourish well in the miserable soil of the garden, still they might bloom for the season if plunged therein in their own pots. So he had warmly urged that the experiment might be tried, and he promised to supply some specimens for the purpose from the overcrowded grounds of Sunnymount.

So the gardener had come one morning with pots of verbenas of all shades, from glowing scarlet to pure white. He brought lemon-scented geraniums, graceful fuchsias, and numberless other kinds of beautiful plants in full bloom, and these were plunged as directed, 'just for a trial.' The result was, that the whole garden was lit up with a brightness it had never possessed before, and the boys declared they

never imagined the place could be made to look so pretty.

Scarcely a day passed but some token of remembrance came from one or other of the Bridges. Sometimes Lucy sent a book she thought Margaret would like, or Mrs. Bridges would despatch a supply of ripe fruit for the boys, which was a prime treat to them. They were truly good-natured people, and might have been a blessing to the place, had they, as Sam said, 'recognised their opportunities.'

One fine evening Mr. Sam drove Lucy over to Shrublands in an open carriage, and asked Margaret and Harry to come out for a drive.

'Where shall we go?' asked Lucy, as Maggie, nothing loath, took her seat beside her. 'Have you any choice, Miss Vernon?'

'Harry was just going to Weston Common—but that would be an unpleasant drive, I am afraid.'

'Not at all,' said Mr. Sam Bridges, turning round; 'we can drive round by the "Five Hills," go to the common, and return by the lower road. Will that do?'

The ladies agreed the route was all that could be wished, and they set off in good spirits, Mr. Sam driving, and Harry seated on the box beside him.

'We want poor Mrs. Askew to come and live with us as housemaid,' explained Maggie. 'Harry was just taking a note to her about it. Her husband died lately from the effects of an accident in Mr. Kingston's mine, and her only little baby died also a week or two ago.'

'Do you think the poor woman will make a good servant?'

'I daresay she will require some training, like all the Blacknorth women do; some of them are very uncouth. We have had some rare specimens,' said Maggie, laughing.

'I'm sure it is very good of you to be troubled with them; we never could endure their awkwardness, and always got our servants from a distance. Their jargon is intolerable, and their voices harsh beyond measure. Do you think they ever repay you, and improve?' asked Lucy.

'Sometimes they grow more polished; but even in the rough, many of them are good, honest creatures. Sarah Evans, for instance—the girl who is leaving us now, and who is going to be married to one of the puddlers belonging to your father's mine—is faithful to a degree, and a capital manager, but her language is pure Blacknorth dialect; I can hardly understand her sometimes.'

'You must have a good store of patience to bear that,' said Lucy.

'Why does it require so much patience?' said Mr. Bridges, turning round. 'An unpolished vernacular is not a crime. We are extra-refined in those days, and blind our eyes to a diamond if we cannot see its glitter at once. I wish we had more mistresses at Blacknorth like your good mother, Miss Vernon. I should not despair for our workmen then; there would soon be a vast improvement.'

'How do you mean, Sam? How could that affect the miners?' exclaimed his sister.

'Good example, Christian influence, and kindly sympathy would soon improve the race of women; and then we should have better wives and happier

homes; we should have wiser mothers and more carefully-trained children.'

'I declare you are getting round to the old subject again. There is only one bone of contention among us, Miss Vernon,—there is only one rock we split on,—and Sam always manages, with the most persevering assiduity, to turn round the conversation to that topic. Let me see, we began about your new housemaid, and here we are at wives and mothers in general.'

'Everybody laughed at the young lady's warmth. She was very good-tempered about it, but one could see there was unpleasantness to her in the topic, and they speedily began talking about other things.

The views were very pretty among the hills. Sometimes they seemed almost closed in, and could see nothing but the road, the rugged hillside, and the sky above them; then they emerged at the turnings, and had beautiful glimpses of valley and meadow. This part of the country was green and verdant, while beyond the hills lay the region of the mines and smoke.

Mrs. Askew's heart was made glad by the prospect of speedy employment. Her home was desolate now, and poverty, with its gaunt arm, was coming very near, making the loss of her husband more and more felt every day.

'I will do my best to please your good mamma, miss. Indeed, indeed I will,' said she, with tears in her eyes; 'and if I can ever do the young master any service, I shall be very thankful,' said she, turning to Harry, who had come into the cottage with Maggie. 'He came to us like a good angel from

heaven on that dreadful night, miss. He dressed my poor husband's wounds, and quieted the poor baby, that's been taken from me also. My husband prayed for him the last day he lived,—he did indeed, miss, —and God has heard his prayer. I'm sure He has, for my poor husband was a good, prayerful man.'

Harry remembered that night well, and the remembrance made him thoughtful, as he took his seat beside Mr. Bridges again. Coming back, they drove to some high ground, and Mr. Bridges stopped the carriage for some minutes, that the ladies might look down on the glowing furnace fires below. Dozens of burning caldrons were pouring out their flames; streams of red fire were here and there running along the ground, as the melted ore streamed out into its moulds in a flaming mass. Dark heavy smoke was rolling off in one direction, and the mingled sounds of whirling machinery and clanking chains rose up to them, softened by distance.

'How horrid it all looks!' said Lucy, with a shudder. 'One would think Vulcan and all his crew were let loose there. Do come away, or I shall be dreaming of all sorts of terrible things.'

Mr. Sam Bridges looked sharply at Maggie to see if she thought it horrid also; but her eyes were calmly surveying the scene, and then glancing upward to the bright harvest moon, which was beginning to shine over the hill-tops. What her train of thought was he could not tell, for she was silent; while Harry and Miss Bridges merrily compared notes about their impressions of the mysterious-looking scene. Perhaps Maggie was doing what Arthur said was her habit, 'extracting poetry' out of it,—contrasting the earthly

fire, with its smoke, and fuss, and flicker, to the calm, pure heavenly light that was shining down on the whole, and looking serenely on the weary turmoil. Perhaps she was making a symbol of this, as poets can, and dreaming of the tale of troubled, world-weary human life, and the far-off, peaceful rest 'that remaineth.'

Harry Vernon had grown a great favourite with the Bridges. Carrie kept up a light, sportive manner with him, as on the first evening. She employed him in little services, talked and laughed pleasantly when they met, and altogether made much of him, in a way that was very delightful to the boy, and he admired her accordingly, as youths will admire ladies who are a few years older than themselves. He was a manly, generous lad,—a little fastidious, perhaps, and rather rash and inexperienced,—but for genuine warm-heartedness, true honesty, and good temper, there was none among the Shrubland sons to compare with him. Arthur was far more clever, and from his earliest days had been named as the one who was to study his father's profession, with the view of assisting him some time or other. This was enough for Harry. He had waived all claims to a classical education and a college career, and had been content with a clerkship, or whatever might come in his way, so that the family expenses might not be increased, and that the needed funds might be ready when Arthur's time came. Whether he wished to be a doctor himself or not, no one knew. He had kept his inclinations carefully out of sight, and had unselfishly determined to push Arthur on to the utmost. He considered the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places when Mr.

Sam Bridges made him a confidential clerk; and they worked together in perfect unison, both being very much of the same mind, and taking the same views of things in general.

The time was come for the Bridges to leave Sunnymount. The last touches had been given to the London establishment, and now the place was ready for their reception. Harry could not resist taking a last look of them. He lingered about that afternoon till the two carriages came in sight; then he managed to meet them, and was rewarded with a last gracious smile and bow from the well-pleased Carrie.

'The old house looks wretchedly desolate,' said Mr. Sam Bridges, when he returned from the station after seeing his friends off. 'I've hardly courage to return to the great lonely place just now; and if your mother will give me a cup of tea this evening, I shall esteem it a great favour.'

'Oh, do come! I am so glad. Mother will be delighted, and so will Maggie. I hope you will often feel very dull now, Mr. Bridges, and come to us to cheer you.'

Would Margaret Vernon be glad to see him? This question occupied Sam during a good part of his walk to Shrublands. In fact the subject was one he had thought frequently about lately, and he was no nearer getting to the truth than he had been when he first took the idea into his head. He liked her more than any woman he had ever seen, and he felt convinced he should find in her one who would ever uphold his views with regard to the welfare of his people. They would agree heart and mind in *that*, and their principles would spring from the same source,—'a deep

feeling of duty to God and man,' and a true comprehension of the stewardship one day to be given in. Like many men of his practical nature, Sam was timid and reticent with regard to affairs of the heart. He would linger and wonder, keeping himself in uncertainty, rather than come to a crisis that might crush his hopes altogether. So he waited and watched Miss Vernon, never venturing to commit himself in any way, or allowing her a glimpse of the admiration and deep love he felt towards her.

The office was near the region of the mine; so Harry and he had to pass through several muddy streets, and down many gloomy alleys, before they reached their destination. The usual regiment of children were not thronging the door-steps or quarrelling in the gutters this afternoon, but their voices rung forth from the crowded houses, mingled with the hoarser or shriller admonitions and threats of their mothers, who were plagued with them in-doors. Heavy autumn rain had set in, and large drops were dripping down on the passers from the shoots and roofs of the houses.

The transient glory of the Shrublands garden was over, and the pots of flowers had been carried off to some retreat in-doors, to give them a chance of struggling through the coming winter. Nothing could be more dreary than the present aspect of the place, with the wretched trees blown about by the wind, and dripping with the rain, that washed down whole masses of smoke and soot from them.

CHAPTER X.

EVENINGS AT SHRUBLANDS.

BUT if the aspect was dreary outside, there was peace and comfort within the house at Shrublands. The sound of a piano was heard as Harry opened the drawing-room door to introduce his tall friend. Maggie rose at once. A slight blush had risen at the sudden interruption, but her manner was easy and graceful as she closed the instrument and prepared to leave the room.

'We have disturbed you, Miss Vernon,' exclaimed Mr. Bridges. 'Do go on; a little music will cheer us after our wet walk.'

'I think a cup of tea will cheer you far more,' replied she, laughing; 'and as it is quite ready, we will go into the dining-room.'

'Am I to forfeit your song, then?' asked the guest.

'Oh no; I will sing for you after tea, if you care to hear me,' replied the young lady frankly.

Dr. Vernon was sitting in his arm-chair, half-asleep over a newspaper he held in his hand. Mrs. Vernon was opposite him in a similar chair, with some light work in her hand, watching her husband, and feeling so glad he was not out in this weather,

but had every prospect of taking a meal with them in peace. The boys were here and there about the room, all reading according to their taste. In the middle of the apartment the long table was neatly spread for tea, the doctor's end, as usual, having some cold meat laid on it. They had only been waiting for Harry, and, after a warm and cordial welcome to Mr. Bridges, they all gathered round the table.

'You had better come near me,' said the doctor cheerily; 'the best fare lies at this end of the table.'

But Mr. Bridges declined. 'I dined early,' he said, 'just before they had all gone away.'

'Then your friends have left Sunnymount to-day?'

'Yes,' replied Sam dolefully; 'I'm all alone in my glory there now.'

'Have they taken all the servants with them?' asked Harry, who had gloomy views of the place now.

'Oh no,' replied Sam, laughing; 'they have left me a sufficient staff, and I have a famous old housekeeper, who will take good care of me. I shall be kept in good order, I have no doubt.'

'Shall you be afraid of her, sir?' asked Edward gravely, with his great eyes all eager with sympathy, and there was a general laugh at the boy's earnestness.

'I don't think I shall be very much afraid, Edward, though no doubt Mrs. Edney will try to have her own way. These are early days yet, my boy; but I daresay I shall find all the pretty things in the drawing-rooms done up in brown Holland by the time I get home. She will take it for granted I shall not require that part of the house much,' continued he laughingly, as he gave a quick glance at Margaret.

'Some confidential housekeepers assume great airs of importance,' remarked Mrs. Vernon musingly.

'Yes; and Mrs. Edney is not one whit behind her class in that. She has kept a strict hand on me ever since I was a boy. I really used to be more afraid of her than I was of my mother. She was the family nurse in those days. However, she is a good, kindly creature, and I consider myself very fortunate in having her at Sunnymount.'

After tea, the doctor and Mr. Bridges fell into a deep discussion about the ways and means of the people of Blacknorth. Both were deeply interested in the subject, and Dr. Vernon had much good advice and many hints with which to enlighten the new iron-master. Maggie had some fine lacework in her hands, and though she did not join much in the conversation, she listened attentively, and her animated face showed she was taking rapid notes of all they said. At last Mr. Bridges looked round and caught her earnest eye, and noted her intent, grave looks.

'We are prosing away on a very dry subject, Miss Vernon. I ought to apologise for talking so much about my work-people.'

'But I like it,' said Maggie brightly. 'What a grand thing it will be for them when all these plans are carried out!'

'We must begin little by little; and human instrumentality is not *all* that is needed,' replied Sam gravely.

'No, indeed,' replied the doctor quickly; 'we shall also require the divine guidance and blessing. We may look in vain to reap any benefit unless *that* is granted.'

'I sometimes feel almost discouraged that my opportunities are so limited,' rejoined Mr. Bridges. 'It will take a long time to carry out the plans of improvement. We want, besides our new church, a workmen's club, a savings bank, schools for adults as well as for children. I should like an evening school, Miss Vernon, where the poor women might gather when their day's work is over, and learn how to make and mend their children's clothes. Some of them seem utterly oblivious that such employment is at all required, and their little ones are in rags.'

'That could easily be managed,' replied Maggie. 'Mrs. Pierce could organize such an institution very thoroughly.'

'Then I must ask you to explain the matter to her some day. You would take an interest in it, would you not?'

'That I should. The women and girls of the place are wretched managers. It provokes me to see the clothes they often buy,—fine, showy things that stand no wear; and they spend on one useless piece of finery what might procure a whole decent suit.'

'They will know the value of their clothes better when they have learned how to make them,' rejoined Mrs. Vernon.

'I see I have placed the subject in a very good train,' said Mr. Bridges, smiling, 'and I am sure *now* it will be effectually carried out. May I remind you of a promise you made me a short time ago, Miss Vernon?'

'What did I promise?'

'We made a kind of compact before tea,—you are to sing for me.'

'Then I am quite ready to fulfil *my* part of the compact,' replied Maggie, laughing, and then there was a general move to the drawing-room.

Maggie played and sang for them in her usual unaffected manner. Being the only performer that evening, she was rather afraid of boring her audience, and rose once or twice to leave the piano; but she was persuaded to sit down again. Her father said he was quite enjoying the evening, and wondered what had happened the people of Blacknorth that they left him in peace so long. Mr. Sam Bridges listened also, scarcely losing a note or movement of Maggie's, so intently did he watch her. Her style of singing pleased him infinitely more than all the showy operatic performances he had been accustomed to at his sisters' parties at Sunnymount. At last he rose to go. The evening had passed rapidly away, and he had a long walk before him.

'Surely you are not going to *walk* on such a stormy night!' exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, with her kind, motherly care.

'I have no choice,' replied he pleasantly, 'for I came here quite unexpectedly. Mrs. Edney has no idea of my whereabouts, nor has the groom; but I don't mind the journey in the least. This evening has been a great boon to me. I was wretchedly out of sorts when I set out for your house.'

'Then I hope you will use the remedy whenever you feel the need for it,' replied Mrs. Vernon warmly; 'we shall always be glad to see you. I am sure Sunnymount will often seem lonely now.'

'That it will. I shall be pleased to get away from it sometimes, so I will gladly accept your invitation,

Mrs. Vernon, and come to you when my loneliness gets the upper hand of me.' Then, with one of his rapid glances at Maggie, he went out into the darkness and storm.

This was his first visit, but many others followed it. He often wanted to consult Dr. Vernon about some of his schemes. No sentimental benevolence urged him on in the various plans he formed for the miners. Enthusiastic he certainly was, but he viewed the matter cautiously, and examined facts well before he acted. He worked without intermission. The mines had never been so well regulated before. After a long discussion with the doctor in the study, he would join the ladies, and music or reading would be the rule of the evening.

Life was very bright to Maggie at those times—*why*, she hardly paused to ask herself; and perhaps had she done so she would not have been able to answer the question. Mr. Bridges continued to admire her, he became convinced the happiness of his life would depend on her returning his affection, and he longed to perceive some token of her regard. Honest man as he was, he doubted his power of winning her, for he rightly paid her too high a compliment to imagine his being rich and his having a fine house would be all-potent with her, as it might be with some girls.

As time went on, Maggie grew more and more reserved with him; there was no longer the glad look of welcome when he came, or the soft blush when he eagerly consulted her about anything.

She had become reserved, or proud, or cross, he could not tell which, and his study grew bewildering,

and cost him many uneasy doubts. He feared to put his doubts into the form of an inquiry, lest he should bring even the present state of things to a close. So he hid his anxiety, and came and went as usual, though the reticence of Maggie seemed to grow deeper. She was not a fickle girl, or even fanciful, and yet she was quite aware her manner to Mr. Bridges had changed; she intended it should change, and the reason was this:—One day she went on her usual visit to 'Myrtle Court.' Mrs. Pierce was with her then,—the good woman had got over her fit of illness,—so together they trod the dim, dingy streets on a very damp afternoon. Gusts of unpleasant odours, and shouts of noisy children greeted their ears as they went along, but this was usual, and they hardly noticed it. They called first at Mrs. Sharp's, and they found poor Lizzy's pains and ailments were over. She had slept off to *rest* that morning, and the last flowers Maggie had sent her were wreathed on her motionless breast. So there was nothing to be done there, beyond a kind word of sympathy to the weeping mother, and a last look at the pale, calm face of the sleeper. Then they went on to Mrs. Brown's, and found her in a state of great bustle and excitement. She had a young girl in, a daughter of one of the miners, to help her tidy the house and take care of the children, because she was going out to work on the morrow.

'Mrs. Edney, the housekeeper at Sunnymount, has employed me as charwoman, and I'm likely to get more than a month's work at the big house.'

'I'm glad of that, Sarah,' replied Mrs. Pierce; 'I suppose she will pay you well.'

'That she will, ma'am,' said Sarah, wiping her hands, preparatory to showing her visitors upstairs, and they all went up together.

Jack was slowly mending, though his leg was still strapped down in the same constrained position. His hands were free, though, and he seemed to have been employing them actively. The bed was strewed with books and papers, for he was trying to improve his reading, and told Maggie, with a beaming face, that he 'could read a whole chapter through now, except there were very big words in it.'

'And I'm learning to write too,' said he, showing some letters he had been copying from print.

'I will send you a copy-book,' said Maggie encouragingly, 'and you will find it much easier to learn from the slips.'

Jack was delighted at the prospect. 'You know, Miss, I'd best learn to cipher also, as I'm going to be a gardener. I can keep accounts then, and I shall want to write down the names of plants, like the Sunnymount gardener does.'

'Then you've quite made up your mind about your future employment, Jack?'

'Oh yes, Miss. Wasn't God very good to lay me up like this, and to let me hurt my foot, else I might have been down in the mines all my life. Oh! it is horrid down there. I used to cry half the day, and my legs were sore from sitting in the wet, and my head always ached from the darkness. I used to pray that father might come and find me dead in that little hole some day. It is very hard to be a trapper, Miss.'

'I am sure it must be,' replied Maggie kindly; 'and I'm very glad you are not to be one any more.'

When they returned downstairs again, Mrs. Brown was especially communicative about the doings at Sunnymount.

'The house is to be put in order from the top to the bottom,' said she; 'the curtains are to be taken down and the carpets up. Mrs. Edney is making great preparations,' added she, with a knowing smile.

'What are they for?' asked Mrs. Pierce, with some curiosity. 'Mrs. Edney tells me the master is to bring home a wife there after Christmas.'

'Indeed! well I never! I did not know Mr. Sam Bridges was going to be married.'

'Oh yes, ma'am; Mrs. Edney tells me it's all settled. He's going to marry the eldest Miss Wilson —a grand lady, sure! Her brother is coming to Sunnymount to stay, and Mr. Sam Bridges is going back to London with him before Christmas.'

Every word came to Maggie with a ringing clearness, and she believed them implicitly. Why should they be untrue? Why should not Mr. Bridges marry Miss Wilson, or any other grand London lady? He was nothing to her,—had never spoken of love, and never sought her affection. Not in words, certainly; but what did his earnestness, his looks, his attentions mean? *She* had been wrong in her interpretation of them, that was all, and she would be wiser in future. But a bitter feeling came over her; she was disappointed in her hero, for he must be deceitful and false at heart, both to herself and to Miss Wilson.

Poor Maggie thought all this, while the women talked on not heeding her silence. She looked round the mean room, noting everything in it, watching the young girl dust the dresser and range up the cracked

plates again; she looked at the children playing together, and heard their shrill words, while all the time a great hope was dying out of her heart, and a brightness out of her life. And this was the reason that when Mr. Sam Bridges came that very evening to Shrublands, he found her reserved, silent, and distant. With a gentle dignity she had closed up all her little kindly ways and pretty softnesses, as a flower shuts up its leaves tightly over its heart when the sunshine has passed by.

This was very puzzling to the young man, who had not been behind the scenes, and who knew nothing of his old housekeeper's gossip. So he resolved to watch and wait longer before he spoke, lest he should be driven out from her presence altogether.

Part of the gossip was true, however, and served to give an authenticity to the rest in Maggie's mind. Mr. Wilson came to stay at Sunnymount, and during his visit there Mr. Bridges never once called at Shrublands. He came, however, a few days before Christmas, and then it was to say 'good-bye,' as he was going to remain some time with his friends in London.

'I can leave the office now without any fear, for Harry understands everything perfectly, and he will send a telegram to me if I am wanted.'

'But you'll stay to tea with us this evening?' suggested Mrs. Vernon presently.

'No, thank you, I must be off at once,' replied he, nervously,—for Maggie was sitting opposite, her lips closed, and her eyes bent on her work. 'I must go back to Sunnymount, for Wilson has all the house to himself, and he hates being left alone. He has been down in the mine and everywhere with me this week.'

'Then I wish you a very happy Christmas, Mr. Bridges; remember me kindly to your friends when you see them.'

'I will, with pleasure, Mrs. Vernon; and as for the happy Christmas, I shall be glad when I return from London again. I would much rather have remained here, but my friends made such a point of my going that I could not refuse.'

'Give my kind regards to your sisters also,' said Maggie, looking up.

'That I will, Miss Vernon,' exclaimed he warmly; 'they often mention you in their letters, and still retain a pleasant remembrance of the time you all spent together.'

The next day he was gone, and the family at Shrublands settled down into their old ways and customs, as though the intercourse with Sunnymount had never been. There was nothing left of it at present except the *memory*, and that Maggie tried most perseveringly to crush out. She had quite made up her mind that Mr. Sam's marriage would take place during his absence, and she fully expected, in her own thoughts, that he would bring home his bride with him. However, she kept her anticipations to herself.

Many letters came to the office from Mr. Sam Bridges, which were duly spoken of and commented on at the tea-table, while Margaret listened in grim silence. Whatever enjoyments had been prepared for Mr. Sam in his home circle, they certainly did not seem to lessen his intense interest in Blacknorth and its doings.

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTMAS FAMILY GATHERINGS.

CHRISTMAS came with a melancholy downpour of rain. The usual accompaniments of the season were absent that year,—no snow, or frost, or sleet,—and people shook their heads and spoke of a 'green Christmas and a full churchyard.'

The Vernons all went through the rain to morning service at the church, about a mile away, and found about a score other people there besides themselves. There was but little attempt at ornamentation; a few straggling bushes stuck into the tops of the high pews was the only sign there of the joyful season of festival. A few Sunday-school children sang a Christmas hymn sadly out of tune and time. The old vicar seeing his congregation were so few, mumbled out a sermon about ten minutes long, and then the people set out again in the heavy rain to return to their homes. Anything more dead or more dull could hardly be conceived. Well was it for Blacknorth that the iron church would soon be ready, and that an energetic zealous labourer in the Lord's vineyard was coming to scatter the dense drowsiness that had fallen on the religious services of the place.

In the evening, before the gas was lighted, Margaret was standing at the drawing-room window, looking out at the constant drip, drip, on the garden paths. She was watching the rain, though her eyes scarcely noted it, for her thoughts were busy with a mental picture. She had conjured it up before her, with its outline, its background, and its accessories, and it remained with a torturing pertinacity.

The imagination of youth is vivid and its colourings strong, so this glowing vision was almost like a reality to poor Maggie. It was the interior of a London house, rich with all that wealth and luxury could make it. The figures in this composition were the assembled family of the Bridges, and the centre group was Mr. Sam and his fashionable bride-elect, the handsome Miss Wilson.

Presently a pair of arms caught her round the waist, and a cheery voice said, softly—

'Why, Maggie, what is the matter with you? Have you grown deaf all at once? I've spoken to you three times, and you took no notice.'

'You should not startle one so, Harry; you quite frightened me with your sudden manner.'

'I was afraid you had turned into a statue. The boys want to know if you will play the accompaniments of some carols they would like to sing.'

'Oh yes! of course I will, Harry. Ring for lights, please;' and she turned to the window again.

Harry put his arm round her. 'What were you thinking of when I came in, Maggie? You are nearly as abstracted as Mr. Bridges is.'

'Is he abstracted? Well, I suppose he has plenty *to occupy* his thoughts, and that makes him seem so.'

'I think I know what occupies his thoughts a good deal, Maggie,—and I'm pretty sure of it too. He was very much cut up at having to go away; he seemed quite unhappy about it.'

'I don't know why he should be unhappy. He had a very pleasant meeting with his friends in prospect.'

'Yes; but sometimes even *that* is not all one wants, Maggie. Why are you so reserved to him now?'

'Who told you I was reserved?' asked Maggie, while a sudden blush overspread her face.

'Mr. Bridges himself; and I could see plainly he was very troubled about it. Now don't be silly, Maggie; if he makes you an offer don't refuse him, for he is one of the best and most honourable of men, —a true gentleman in heart, and, above all, a Christian. Don't refuse him, Maggie, promise me that!'

Harry spoke warmly, as he always did when he praised Mr. Bridges. His liking for him and his enthusiasm in his cause had only deepened as time wore on.

'I am not likely to have the power of refusing, Harry. There is no likelihood of my ever being put to the test.' And her eyes filled with sudden tears.

Mrs. Askew came into the room with a light, so their conference was brought to an end, and Maggie sent off her brother to summon the other boys, as she was quite ready to play for them.

We must take a peep at the family of the Bridges in their stylish London home; and it is but justice to say that Maggie's picture of them had no foundation whatever, as far as Miss Wilson was concerned.

Sam arrived late on the Christmas eve, and had only just time to take a rapid survey of their new

abode. Then Lucy led the way into the library, and became confidential in her conversation with him, feeling provoked all the time at his unusual reserve. He was quiet and reticent, and she tried in vain to fathom the cause of his silence. About his plans for the miners he was eloquent enough, and he told her how favourably some of his darling schemes were being worked out; but as soon as she began to talk about the Vernons his reserve returned,—it was a sore subject just then with him.

'Don't you find Sunnymount very dull now?' exclaimed Lucy at last.

'It *is* very quiet, of course, now you two noisy girls are gone; but I'm not sure that I don't like the contrast.'

'That's very polite of you, Sam; you ought to be full of lamentations at our absence.'

'You know Wilson has been down to cheer me up. He's a capital fellow,—won't allow any one to be in peace for an instant. I talked volumes and rode miles while he was at Sunnymount.'

'Has he gone home now?'

'Yes, he came by train as far as Sturton with me this morning. There is a great gathering of aunts and cousins at his place—the "Elms"—this Christmas, I believe. He wanted me to join them.'

'And you didn't care to go?'

'Not the least, I assure you, Lucy. Had I not come here I should have remained at Sunnymount; indeed, I had many scruples at leaving the place for such a long time.'

'I suppose you often see the Vernons?'

'Harry Vernon is in my office every day, you know.'

'But I mean the ladies of the family. Do you ever see Miss Vernon?'

'Yes, sometimes. Her father is a great help to me, and gives me useful hints about many things.'

He looked full at his sister, as though wondering if any more questions were coming.

'Is Maggie as nice and as pretty as ever?'

'I suppose so. It would be early days for her to degenerate yet.'

'Now, Sam, I shan't ask you another question if you answer me in that way.'

'Did you expect me to say Miss Vernon's hair had turned grey with regret at your departure?'

'No; but I thought you would have told me you had secured her friendship by this time. She is a dear, sweet girl, and I fancied you would have had sufficient discernment to discover *that*. I wonder you have not recognised the true metal.'

'Perhaps I have recognised it, Lucy, only to find that it does not shine for me,' replied he moodily.

Strong and practical man as he was, he could not attempt any disguise where his feelings were concerned, and Lucy instantly noticed his discomfiture, as a quick flush passed over his brow. Whatever the reason was, some cloud of doubt or distrust was over his thoughts with regard to Maggie. Whether it was pique or uncertainty his sister could not decide, but she felt sorry for it, as in her own heart she had planned how well they would suit each other.

Lucy was oftentimes frivolous and thoughtless herself, but she knew her brother's decided character, and she also looked on Maggie as one of the

purest and truest of girls, therefore especially fitted to become his wife.

When her brother spoke again, it was on another subject; he asked how she liked her new home.

'Very much indeed. We neither of us would return to Sunnymount again—to live.'

'Who do you mean by *neither?*'

'Well, Carrie and myself. I cannot answer for mother and father, of course. I think, though, they rather prefer the old place still. Here we go about a good deal—we drive and ride in to London whenever we like; we have lots of invitations, and go out quite as much as is good for us.'

'Perhaps more than is *good* for you.'

'That is a matter of opinion, my wise brother. We always differ on that subject, so I will say no more about it. To-morrow we shall be quite alone,' continued Lucy musingly; 'but after Christmas we shall have a succession of visitors, and several parties. I hope you will stay for them all.'

'I can only stay ten days, Lucy, for I'm going to the mines in the north, and it will be fully a month before I shall be able to get back to Blacknorth again —a much longer time than I like to be absent. But now I must get hold of father; I've no end of things to ask him about.'

Old Mr. Bridges was in the library—a brightly-furnished room, with a Turkey carpet on the floor, and crimson-covered sofas and easy-chairs. It was well filled with books of all sorts and sizes in new bindings, and doubtless Mr. Bridges could have found plenty of instructive food there for his mind had he so willed it. But this evening his son found

him seated before the fire, with a book on the floor just before him, and he was employing the interval between dinner and tea in peaceful slumber.

The dutiful son smiled as he looked at his father's placid face, and he crept quietly out of the room again without disturbing him.

'I would not waken him for the world,' thought he; 'my consultation can stand over for a couple of days.' And he found his way to his mother and sisters in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Bridges had numberless questions to ask her son. She was anxious to know everything that had gone on at Sunnymount since she left. Nothing seemed too trivial for her to inquire about—the housekeeping, the expenses, Mrs. Edney's management of the servants; and when her son confessed his ignorance in numberless cases, she shook her head gravely, and thought he must be fast going on to ruin.

Sam laughed heartily at her forebodings, and promised to keep a keener look-out in future.

'I must inquire how much butter we use, and put a limit to bacon,' said he.

'By the by, how is my old admirer, Harry Vernon?' said Carrie, looking up.

'Quite well; and a fine young fellow he is. I am very proud of my assistant—my confidential clerk, as I call him.'

'Yes, I am sure he is very good-natured, and all that,' said Carrie, with lofty superiority. 'Young fellows like he are so wonderfully enthusiastic and romantic. Their freshness amuses me amazingly.'

'You used to flirt desperately with him,' rejoined

Lucy, giving her a look of admonition. 'I told you of it repeatedly, and warned you that Harry would begin to believe you were in earnest with him.'

Carrie laughed lightly, with a soft, silvery burst of merriment, and Sam looked thoughtfully at her bright, triumphant face. How *could* girls make a jest of what was so sacred a feeling of the human heart? How could they delight in rousing affections only to crush them? Oh! the mischief that was done in that cruel way. Many a life was robbed of its faith, and rendered desolate and miserable in consequence.

'Why are you looking so gravely at me, Sam?' said Carrie, going over and sitting beside him, while she took his hand and fixed her eyes affectionately on his face.

'I was only wondering if you girls had any conscience, and if it pricks you sometimes. Never trifle with an honest heart, Carrie. If it is not one you would care to win, and that you could give affection for in return, let it alone, and do not waken ideas that can only end in disappointment.'

'You need not be so shocked about a little bit of fun,' retorted Carrie, tossing her head; 'one must find some amusement in a dull place like Blacknorth.'

'You remind me of the fable of the boys and the frogs,—what may be sport to you may be painful to those you make pastime with. I only hope my good friend Harry did not believe in you, that's all.'

Mr. Bridges now came into the room, looking only half awake, and surprised that tea was not ready.

'I'll ring the bell, my dear,' said his wife. 'Have *you* had a nap in the library?'

But Mr. Bridges, like most other after-dinner sleepers, could not be brought to confess his slumbers. 'He might have dozed for a minute—not more, certainly. I suppose you indulge in that way, Sam, now you are alone?'

'I have not time, father. Mrs. Edney gives me an early dinner generally, and I work hard afterwards.'

'When are you going to the north?'

'In about ten days. Can't you take the trip with me?'

'Perhaps I may, Sam, for I want to spend a little time among the coal-measures there. How does the new mine work?'

'Very well indeed. The overseer is an active man; and that mine is not half the anxiety the one at Blacknorth is, for there is no sulphur in it, and consequently no fear of an explosion every time a miner lights a pipe or opens his safety-lamp.'

And then the conversation between father and son drifted away to scenes and subjects that lay fathoms deep below ground. They spoke of choke-damp and fire-damp, of improvements still needed to ward off all dangers. They spoke of the new iron church to be opened in early spring, and of the hope for the improvement to be effected, under God's blessing, thereby, with an earnestness that showed the topic to be a deeply interesting one.

CHAPTER XII.

FIRE IN THE MINE.

ONE day, in the latter end of January, the Vernon family were gathered round the dining table, and were busily employed with their mid-day meal. The doctor was carving vigorously for the hungry boys, and eating between whiles, without loss of time. He was in a hurry, as usual, having at least half a dozen engagements on his hands, and was going out directly he had finished.

Dinner-hour at Shrublands was not a time of dreamy repose, or of long discussions. The boys were limited in time, as they had to hasten back to Mr. North's school; and Harry was always due at his office. So they were in the habit of looking towards tea-time as the really sociable gathering.

Presently they heard a loud rushing of feet in the street outside, and a quick clamour of loud voices; then a thundering knock came to the door, as though half-a-dozen people were seeking for admittance at once.

'What is the matter?' said the doctor, rising up suddenly. Harry jumped up also as the dining-room door opened. Mrs. Askew stood there, with her face white as death, and her eyes dilated with terror.

'There's an explosion in the mine!' exclaimed she, gasping, as she thought of that other explosion that had caused her poor husband's agonies and death.

'Have you heard the particulars?' asked Mrs. Vernon quickly.

'No, ma'am, there's none as yet. God only knows how many poor creatures are blown to pieces!'

The doctor and Harry were out of the house by this time, and were running down the garden path.

Mrs. Vernon threw open the window—'Harry! Harry! is Mr. Bridges come back?'

'Yes, mother, but I've not seen him yet; he returned this morning,' shouted he, as he opened the gate.

'Thank God for that!' said Mrs. Vernon fervently, as she clasped her hands.

'Mother! mother! let us stay home from school,' said the boys; 'we couldn't learn lessons or read while this is going on.'

'I suppose not. Arthur, you may go and inquire if there is any news yet, but don't go too near the mine, or rush into any danger.'

'I'll take care of that,' replied he, as he ran out to get his cap.

Maggie was standing at the window, watching the distracted people rushing past in scores and dozens, women shrieking, children at their heels crying; no one knew yet but their own bread-earners, their nearest and dearest, might be among the sufferers.

It was a terrible period of suspense, and Maggie leaned against the pane with a blanched cheek, as she fervently offered up a prayer for those in pain and danger.

On went the stream of people; the crowd seemed to grow denser, and the excitement to increase, and the horrified throng went by with affrighted faces and loud wails. Mr. Bridges' mine had been so free from accidents of late, that the catastrophe seemed all the more dreadful from being unexpected.

Arthur pushed on through the people, outstepping most of them, till he reached the common. There hundreds of frightened women and children were gathered, and it seemed at first as though he could never get through the human barrier. But the doctor's son was soon recognised, and a way was made for him. He pushed on, almost in ignorance of how far he was going, till he found himself just at the edge of the pit.

A dreary procession was coming from the shaft as the cage disclosed its burdens,—men scorched and burned, their hands and faces bleeding, their clothes and hair singed off,—and in the lower compartment of the skip was lying a heap of motionless forms, decently laid side by side, with cloths carefully spread over their faces. These were reverently taken up by men who were waiting, and carried slowly off to the engine-room, while a hoarse sob rose from many a manly chest, and a chorus of wails rose from the women.

On that morning, while work was at its height in the mine, the men in one of the clearings heard a sudden hissing sound, like a large body of steam rushing out of a confined space. They threw down their tools to listen, and, almost in a moment, they were dashed to the ground. A terrible explosion was heard, as though thunder shook the place, the very

ground and walls vibrated, and then a fierce blaze of flame rushed on, setting the roof on fire, and darting past like a flash of caged lightning. On it went, roaring and surging, leaving the walls and roof of a fierce glowing red; and explosion after explosion showed the long range of that fearful flame of gas, as it went swiftly on, dealing its terrible doom of destruction and death.

Men and horses fell as it passed, struck to death by the rapid flash, till its awful career was stopped, and the closed trap-doors kept it from extending farther into the mine. Then the flame went trembling out, and nothing remained but the red-hot glowing walls and roof, and the victims of the fatal blaze that had passed through one region of the works.

The men who were employed in these unfortunate tunnels were the victims, and these were the poor mangled forms that Arthur saw on the cage as it came to the surface.

'Where is my father?' whispered he to one of the overseers.

'He's over in the engine-house, sir. We are sending the dead and dying over there.'

'Do you know where my brother is?'

'Oh, sir, he's gone down in the mine with Mr. Sam Bridges; a doctor from Higham, and a lot of miners and volunteers, are gone below also.'

'Is there any danger down there?' asked Arthur, with a shudder.

'I should think there were, sir. Don't 'ee see what's being brought up?'

'But I mean, now the explosion's over, is there any risk to people that go down now?'

'The Lord in heaven only knows, sir,' replied he, with reverence. 'Them as go down the mine now takes their lives in their hands, and don't think of danger, for they knows they are going to save their fellow-creatures, and that God's blessed providence is over them.'

'Of course, I understand all that,' replied Arthur, feeling greatly rebuked, and still very uneasy.

He did not think of returning home now. A deep anxiety bound him to the spot. Dear, brave Harry was down in those awful depths, that were sending up so many fearful victims. He stood there shivering, partly from cold, partly from hidden dread and excitement, as cage after cage landed its dreary burden at the shaft's mouth, and the solemn processions moved off to the engine-house.

Twenty men and boys had already been counted among the dead, and then there came a long pause, that seemed painful in the extreme to the anxious watchers. A last the cage came up again; on the top of it were a number of the volunteers who had gone down, looking perfectly black from smoke and dust. And on the lower level was a stretched-out figure covered with a coat; beside it was Mr. Sam Bridges in a sitting posture, his coat off, his shirt torn and burnt, and his face covered with his bleeding hands.

Arthur rushed over to him at once, as he rose up staggering, and leaned against an empty corby, looking half bewildered and dazzled with the light.

'What is it, Mr. Bridges? Where is Harry?' and with an intuitive presentiment of evil he stooped down to lift the coat.

'Stop, stop!' called out Mr. Bridges faintly. 'He

died to save me. He might have escaped, had he not come to rescue me from the falling timber. Don't touch him! Poor, poor Harry!'

A dozen hands were put forth now to stay the half-distracted boy, as he tried to see his poor brother's mangled body.

'You must not, sir; it's against the orders;' and a couple of strong men held him back, while another slow procession moved away. Others assisted Mr. Sam to the office, and gave him wine, for he was hurt, and almost stifled with the fumes down in the mine.

Arthur at last got away, and ran to the engine-house. He was refused admittance to the inside, but he lingered at the door among the crowd of distracted weepers.

Somehow the names of the sufferers had got about, and the relatives were gathered round the place, eagerly watching for the slightest news from within.

Will Brown was among the dead; in fact, the explosion took place in his part of the workings. So, whether he had been using an open light, or had been indulging in his private habit of smoking, was a thing never now to be known; he had perished with his secret, whatever it was.

Had he used the safety-lamp continually, the explosion might not have taken place, for that apparatus is so constructed that its wire-gauze prevents the fire-damp from getting in to the flame, and it absorbs the heat, so that it has not power enough to be dangerous to the gas on the outside.

This lamp owes its origin to Sir Humphrey Davy, who many years ago turned his attention to the

number of accidents that were constantly happening in coal mines, and by his skill hundreds and hundred of lives have been saved. He may well be called the 'Miner's Friend,' for he has lessened the danger of their occupation very considerably.

Poor Arthur lingered outside the engine-house door, like one distracted. Tears ran down his cheeks, for he was still boy enough to find a vent for his grief in that way, and heavy sobs almost choked him.

'Oh, my brother, my brave, noble brother!' he kept on repeating half aloud. 'If I could only see you once more, only say "good-bye" to you, I could bear it better.'

He had not courage to return home with the news. He dared not face his mother, and reveal the tidings to her; so he waited, and waited, hoping his father would at last come out.

After a time the crowd made way, and Mr. Sam Bridges came there; the surveyor and two or three other people were with him, and they went to the engine-house door together.

'Oh, Mr. Bridges, let me go in with you,' exclaimed Arthur, with the tears streaming down his cheeks.

Mr. Sam was looking dreadfully pale. He had a scar on his forehead, and one of his arms was in a sling.

He stopped when he saw Arthur, held out his only available hand, which was the left one, and his eyes filled with a sudden moisture.

'Have you not gone home yet, Arthur? Do *they* know about it?'

'Oh, I *can't* tell mother,' sobbed he. 'Let me see poor Harry, Mr. Bridges.'

'It would be useless, Arthur,—you would not know

him. He has been frightfully crushed. Wait here, and I will inquire when your father will be ready.'

Several people were in the engine-house now with the sick and dying,—a second doctor, the old vicar, and some nurses, who were making themselves useful in dressing the wounds.

Now and then a poor sufferer would be brought out and removed to his cottage, it being found that he could bear the journey. For other men, whose injuries were greater, temporary beds were made up on the spot; and for the rest of the victims two or three carpenters were already taking orders.

Dr. Vernon did not come out till nearly seven o'clock, and then he looked pale and haggard in the moonlight.

Mr. Sam Bridges was with him, and the doctor was saying: 'Now you must go home, and get to bed at once, or you will be laid up. I will call and see you in the morning.'

'Oh, here is poor Arthur waiting still!' exclaimed Mr. Bridges, stopping suddenly.

'Do they know? Have you told them?' asked the doctor eagerly.

'I was waiting for you, father,' replied the boy, sobbing.

'Well, come on then; it must be done;' and the three went across the common, and down the hill into the crowded streets together.

They were stopped every now and then by anxious relatives, who would fain have known more about the dismal accident.

'Is it true there are more 'en fifty men killed?' asked one old woman.

'Nothing of the sort, Mrs. Greaves,' replied the doctor; 'there are twenty poor fellows dead, and as many more injured.'

'Oh! then 'tain't half as bad an accident as there was at Kingston's mine about ten years ago, when my man was killed. There was sixty lying of a row then.'

'Oh, it's bad enough!' said the doctor, stepping quickly past her; and then they all three came to Shrublands gate, and walked up the garden.

'I had better not go in,' said Mr. Bridges, drawing back as they came to the door.

'You must stay for a short time, till your chaise comes; Benson is gone for it. I won't ask you to remain long, for there will be sad trouble in-doors.'

'I will go and wait in the study then;' and the doctor and Arthur went on to the dining-room.

Sam stood in the dark study, looking out on the bare garden, where the moonlight was giving glimpses of the leafless trees, but his thoughts had followed the doctor, and were with him in that dread interview that must take place. He pictured Maggie's grief in a dreamy, stunned sort of way. She would mourn bitterly for her favourite brother, and wish, perhaps, *he* had been taken instead. Harry could have escaped. He had gone past the horrible danger of falling timbers and red-hot walls, when he looked back and saw himself down—struggling—helpless. He could not quite remember *how*, but presently there was a rush, a crash, and he was free, while poor Harry was lying all in a heap, with tons of blazing ruins above his writhing body.

He thought all this confusedly, for his senses were

still rather clouded, and his arm in much pain from burns and hurts.

After a time the door of the dark room opened, and he turned round with a start as the doctor came in.

'It is over now,' whispered he; 'I have told them all particulars. Rumours had reached them before, even worse than the reality, for they heard you had been killed also. Come into the dining-room now; Maggie and the boys are there, but my poor wife was forced to retreat to her room.'

Sam never could clearly recollect the events of that evening. He was conscious of pressing Maggie's hand warmly, as she looked at him with her eyes full of tears. He noticed every particle of colour had fled from her face, and her voice was low and trembling. He remembered the doctor made him sit on the sofa, and placed a small table before him, and Maggie came and brought him tea, which tasted like nectar. Never had beverage seemed so reviving, for he was half-fainting; his hand shook as he lifted the cup, and he could not say what he meant, something seemed to choke him so continually. He remembered looking at the long table,—the boys all gathered together at one end, with solemn faces, not eating in their usual hearty manner; and he noticed they spoke in whispers to each other. He remembered Maggie sitting at the head of the table, trying to compose herself, and wiping away the tears stealthily; and he saw the doctor bending over his plate, and looking ten years older than usual. Then he recollected the long drive through the cold night air, that seemed to do him good, and rouse him,—Doctor Vernon sitting by his side, talking to him and watching him tenderly. He

remembered plunging into his bed, and feeling his temples throbbing violently on the pillows, and then his senses grew bewildered.

He was much more seriously hurt than was at first imagined, and a long illness kept him confined to bed till the spring flowers were bright in the garden beds at Sunnymount.

His father came in all haste from London when the news of the accident reached him, and he took the reins of management into his hands again during his son's severe illness. Thus it happened that, when the funeral of poor Harry took place, old Mr. Bridges, and not Mr. Sam, stood at the grave as one of the chief mourners.

The news of Harry Vernon's bravery was known far and near among the people of Blacknorth, for many of the miners had witnessed the act, though they had been too far away to save the poor fellow. They knew, more clearly than even Mr. Sam Bridges himself did, how thoroughly it had been an act of self-sacrifice. He had seen the certain death that threatened his beloved employer and friend, and had leaped forward with desperate haste to save him. Death had overtaken him at the very post of duty; and his name would be long remembered as one of the host of noble martyrs the mining life often wakens up to deeds such as his. Did he remember poor Askew's prayer for him at his last dying moments?—'If ever trouble comes to you, may kind hands soothe your pain, and may Christ Himself strengthen you!' The kind hands of friends who would fain have soothed him were absent in that sudden death-struggle, but doubtless Christ was near; for Harry believed and

trusted in Him, and *He* had power to strengthen him even in that moment of agony, and to lead him forth from the horrors of the dreadful mine to the glory of a brighter world.

After a time the *débris* of the explosion was cleared away from the mine, and the men went about their work as usual, only more cautiously, warned by the dreadful fate of their companions. Many a reproach was thrown on Will Brown; for though no one could *prove* that he had been disobedient or careless, still, from knowing his character so well, they strongly suspected him as being the cause of the accident.

Except for a few more newly-made graves in the churchyard, and a few more aching and sorrowful hearts in the homes at Blacknorth, the traces of the catastrophe had passed away, and things fell into their usual course. The machinery clanked on, and the corbies returned with their full burdens of shining coals; the furnaces blazed away as usual, but the tale of Harry Vernon's brave death, and the loss of the twenty men, would be long told in that neighbourhood, and mourned and lamented over by the winter firesides. It would be related to strangers who came there to see the mines, and it would be repeated to the little children, who would henceforth consider him the bravest of men. Truly some men's deaths teach a never-ending lesson!

CHAPTER XIII.

CHANGES AT BLACKNORTH.

THE opening of the iron church had been put off till Mr. Sam Bridges was well enough to be present; and one lovely morning in May the unwonted sound of a bell from the middle of the crowded streets of Blacknorth gave notice that the happy time had arrived. Crowds of decently-dressed people were passing along the streets, for it was a holiday at the mine, and all those who were not actually required at the furnaces, etc., were at liberty to be present at the opening ceremony.

Mr. Sam Bridges met the Vernons at the church door, and led them to a seat in the rapidly-filling place. Men, women, and children were there, all anxious and eager to see all that was going on.

Mr. Flemming, the new clergyman, whose name became so revered in the place afterwards, took part in the service, and had his first view of the people he was to labour among; and he prayerfully hoped that 'his labours might not be in vain, but that God would crown them with His blessing.'

After the service was over, Mr. Flemming and Mr. Bridges joined the Vernons, and walked with

them to Shrublands, where luncheon was prepared. Sam had wished it to take place at Sunnymount, but the doctor had spoken of the distance, and urged that his own house would be more convenient.

The luncheon was prettily laid out, for Sam had despatched the gardener over there in the morning with a whole bower of his choicest hothouse flowers, and Maggie had arranged them down the table, and in every nook where they could please and delight the eye.

They had not seen much of Mr. Bridges since the accident; he was only able to drive out for short distances, and still looked pale and much shaken. He had called at the door occasionally, but till this day he had not really joined the family circle. Two or three other gentlemen were there also; so, during luncheon, the conversation turned on Church matters, and subjects of that nature.

Mrs. Vernon looked very delicate in her deep mourning. Even now she could hardly bear to speak of Harry without breaking down; and this morning Maggie's thoughts were constantly dwelling on him. How glad he would have been! how much he would have liked to be here! So it came to pass that the ladies were unusually silent, and the burden of the conversation fell on the gentlemen.

When they stood up to go, Sam fell behind them hesitatingly, and stopped to speak to Mrs. Vernon.

'Are you quite strong now?' asked she kindly.

'Very nearly. I hope a very little time will set me quite to rights again. I have reason to be very thankful, when I remember what might have been the case; and yet, Mrs. Vernon, I reproach myself

over and over again, when I consider at what a sacrifice my life was saved. I hate myself, when I think of the brave boy that died for me. You must take me as your son instead,' said he confusedly.

Mrs. Vernon held out her hand to him, while her eyes filled with a rush of tears, and Sam stooped forward, and pressed his lips on her brow.

Then he turned to Maggie, who was standing at the window at the other end of the room.

'Will *you* take me in his place also, Miss Vernon?' said he, looking much moved, and very much in earnest. Margaret held out her hand to him frankly.

She had been schooling herself carefully ever since she had heard of Miss Wilson's coming honours as the future mistress of Sunnymount, and *now* believed she had grown indifferent to the subject, and would be able to bear it without giving any token.

So she held out her hand bravely, and replied, 'I will indeed, Mr. Bridges; I will always look on you as a true, kind brother.'

He looked at her curiously, and she went on, still frankly, 'And I hope by and by we shall see you often. When Miss Wilson is there, we shall be able to visit at Sunnymount more frequently, you know.'

'What has Miss Wilson to do with it?' asked he, surprised.

'Oh, I only mean what everybody in Blacknorth is talking about,' said she, vexed at being drawn into such a subject.

'Do they mean that I am to marry her,—that she is to be my wife?' asked he impatiently.

'That is the general belief,' replied Maggie gravely.

'And did *you* believe it, my only darling?' exclaimed Sam, now fairly gone beyond all limits of reserve.

We will not intrude on their interview, for even Mrs. Vernon had taken the hint, and had left the lovers alone, to explain and decide matters as pleased them best; and it must have taken a long time to settle, for the tea bell rung out before the conference was over.

From this time forth Sam was to be considered one of the family,—the son, the brother, the lover. He was to take Harry's place, and more than Harry's place, among them; and the memory of the poor boy, who had so nobly devoted himself to death, would ever be spoken of among them softly, reverently.

There was no life of mere idleness or luxury before them; for both Maggie and Sam were very unlikely to content themselves by sitting down with folded hands, or only exerting themselves to count the money the rich mines would pour into their coffers.

Neither were they likely to spend that money in empty show, or ostentatious display. They were of one mind on a very important subject, and that was, the temporal and spiritual good of the people entrusted to their care. The responsibility was great, and they would not shirk it.

Old Mr. Bridges had once said to Margaret of his son, that he was not one of those who would 'make haste to be rich,' and he judged him rightly in that respect, for Sam could never be brought to believe the sole duty of man was making a rapid fortune, any more than he imagined the spending or the saving of one was the only object in life.

Many anxieties and much work were before them. The 'field was large and promising,' and they were ready to set out and share it, hand in hand, and heart with heart.

Maggie was very thoughtful after Mr. Sam Bridges went away that evening. All her doubts and distrust of him had vanished now, and the whole strength and beauty of his character was plain to her. Harry's words were coming true after all. He had made her an offer, and she had accepted him. Oh, how the poor boy would have rejoiced at it! How glad he would have been to see his darling Maggie married to one he loved too truly and so worthily! —the 'gentleman at heart,' the 'most honourable of men,' and 'above all, a Christian.'

Maggie thought over his warm description of her future husband, and was ready to endorse it as true to the letter. If Harry could only have been here to share her joy! *That* was the painful thought now; and tears filled her eyes as she looked out of her bedroom window at the clustering stars and the calm spring night. But it was not to be so. His young life had been brought to a sudden close, and murmurs were vain, for it had been 'God's will.' She dared not question *why* he had been taken away; but his death had left a noble lesson, that both herself and the one he had rescued would ever remember and revere.

Our story is nearly at an end; for now the centre group is happily placed, one would not care to linger long over the lights and shades of the mere accessories. Still a word or two about those who have appeared *now* and then may not be unwelcome; and first of all

it may be well to reveal that the gay and thoughtless Carrie Bridges took Harry Vernon's sudden death very much to heart. The circumstances attending it came to her with deep meaning. She thought of her brother's mild reproach to her only a short time before it all happened, when Sam hoped, as the best thing for the boy, that 'he did not believe in her.' She began to examine herself and her ways with an intense inward scrutiny, and she decided things were not as they should be. She loved gaiety, show, position, and amusement with a passionate zeal; and this vain attachment had almost hidden the seeds of a true and loving nature, that were still concealed beneath the flimsy veil. For the first time in her life she felt some compunctions at her vanity and thoughtlessness. She gave up her flirtations from that day, and became in time a thoughtful and earnest woman.

Jack Brown *did* become a gardener. His wish in that respect was fully gratified, and he was enabled to help his widowed mother with his earnings. When Dr. Vernon removed to the new house at the other side of the hill Sunnymount stood on, and which old Mr. Bridges built, Jack was duly installed there, to help to take care of the very pretty piece of ground. He was of course dreadfully inexperienced at first, but the old gardener at Sunnymount took him in hand, and gave him substantial help and unlimited advice, so that in time some of the flowers in Mrs. Vernon's garden could even bear comparison with those of the more favoured Sunnymount blossoms, even though *they* grew on the sunny side of the hill, and got less of the Blacknorth smoke.

Mrs. Vernon had her wish at last, for there were plenty of green trees round their new house, and the air was much fresher there. She could walk in her own garden now, and pick many bright blossoms, without the danger of getting her fingers blackened with coal-dust. Her health speedily improved, for she had been pining away amidst the smoke and noise, that had ever been growing denser and louder every day round the old home at Shrublands.

Blacknorth improved considerably. All that kindness and skill could devise was put in action to better the condition of the miners there.

At best, the lot of the poor men is a hard and trying one. In hardship and danger they delve deep into the caverns of the earth, in order that their more favoured brethren may be supplied with the common necessaries of life.

We should ever think of them with gratitude and kindness, for we owe them a debt we can never repay. Oh that other mines could have the advantages those at Blacknorth enjoy, and that all the miners could have the temporal and spiritual care bestowed on them, which Mr. Sam Bridges, the true-hearted 'ironmaster,' ever bestows on his work-people!

THE END.

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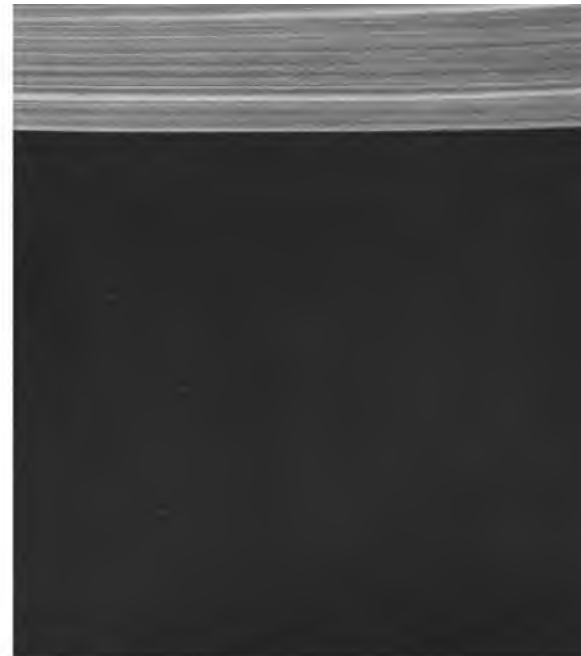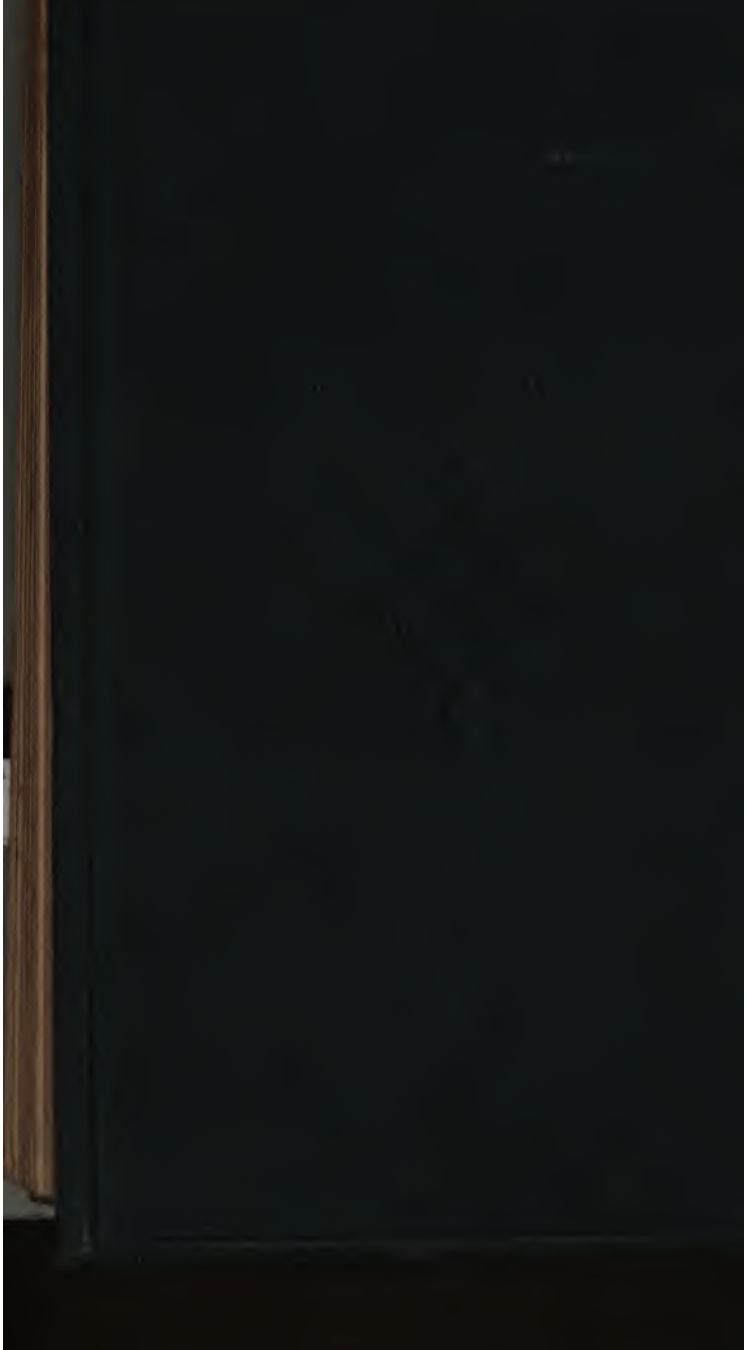
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